# SPECIAL OPERATIONS, IRREGULAR WARFARE, AND OPERATIONAL ART: A THEORY OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS

A Monograph

by

Major William D. Harris Jr.
U.S. Army



School of Advanced Military Studies
United States Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

2013-02

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# REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

*Form Approved*
*OMB No. 0704-0188*

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. **PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

| 1. REPORT DATE *(DD-MM-YYYY)* | 2. REPORT TYPE | 3. DATES COVERED *(From - To)* |
|---|---|---|
| 05-12-2013 | SAMS Monograph | |

| 4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE | 5a. CONTRACT NUMBER |
|---|---|
| SPECIAL OPERATIONS, IRREGULAR WARFARE, AND OPERATIONAL ART: A THEORY OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS | 5b. GRANT NUMBER |
| | 5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER |

| 6. AUTHOR(S) | 5d. PROJECT NUMBER |
|---|---|
| Major William D. Harris | 5e. TASK NUMBER |
| | 5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER |

| 7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) | 8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER |
|---|---|
| School for Advanced Military Studies<br>320 Gibson Avenue<br>Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301 | |

| 9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) | 10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) |
|---|---|
| U.S. Army Command and General Staff College<br>ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD<br>Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301 | 11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S) |

**12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**

Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited

**13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES**

**14. ABSTRACT**

This monograph proposes theories of SOF and irregular warfare to describe how states can use SOF to achieve strategic objectives. The theory defines special operations forces as those forces organized to combat irregulars and irregular warfare as war fought by institutionally weak combatants, as opposed to conventional warfare between institutionally strong states. A study of the evolution of irregular warfare and its theoretical underpinnings leads to five characteristics that differentiate it from conventional warfare. These characteristics define an opaque form of warfare, requiring physical, cognitive, and moral access to successfully pursue strategic objectives. The theory then proposes a set of tenets to guide operational planners and leaders in arranging SOF tactical actions to achieve a strategic objective.

**15. SUBJECT TERMS**

Special operations, irregular warfare, institutions, evolution of warfare, guerrillas, revolution, terrorism, operational art, military theory

| 16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF: | | | 17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT | 18. NUMBER OF PAGES | 19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. REPORT | b. ABSTRACT | c. THIS PAGE | | | |
| (U) | (U) | (U) | Unlimited | | 19b. PHONE NUMBER *(include area code)* |

**Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)**
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39.18

MONOGRAPH APPROVAL PAGE

Name of Candidate: Major William D. Harris Jr.

Monograph Title: Special Operations, Irregular Warfare, and Operational Art: A Theory of Special Operations

Approved by:

_____, Monograph Director
Chris Marsh, Ph.D.


_____, Seminar Leader
John Paganini, COL


_____, Director, School of Advanced Military Studies
Henry Arnold, COL


Accepted this 31st day of October 2013 by:


_____, Director, Graduate Degree Programs
Robert F. Baumann, Ph.D.


The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

SPECIAL OPERATIONS, IRREGULAR WARFARE, AND OPERATIONAL ART: A
THEORY OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS, by Major William D. Harris Jr., 78 pages.

Despite the rapid expansion of special operations forces around the world, their strategic utility
rests on obscure foundations. Building on the insights of the literature on special operations it is
possible to construct a theory of special operations that explains the nature of special operations
forces and the conditions that favor the successful pursuit of strategic purpose through special
operations tactical actions. The theory predicts that states will increasingly create special
operations forces to combat irregular threats because irregular warfare is evolving into a
functionally separate domain of war. Defining Irregular warfare as war fought by institutionally
weak combatants, as opposed to conventional warfare between institutionally strong states,
provides a useful theoretical basis for understanding the nature and history of irregular warfare.
The increase in cross-border linkages and inexpensive weaponry have propelled an historic
expansion of irregular warfare to the point where it is a functionally separate domain of war,
dominated by its own grammar connecting tactical actions to strategic purpose. Designing
operations to contest this irregular domain requires an understanding of the nature of irregular
warfare. Five fundamental characteristics of irregular warfare guide the operational design of
special operations: inability to project power over distance, the prevalence of short-term offensive
actions, the proximity of the tactical and strategic levels, violent competitive coalition building,
and mismatches between limited and total war. These characteristics define an opaque form of
warfare, requiring physical, cognitive, and moral access to successfully pursue strategic purpose.
These three types of access summarize nine tenets of special operations operational art, which the
theory derived from an understanding of the fundamental nature of irregular as a guide for the
design of special operations campaigns. Arranging tactical actions to achieve a continual
expansion of physical, cognitive, and moral access can create a position of advantage from which
special operations forces can pursue a strategic objective.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

> There is, however, one kind of special unit which should be retained—that designed to be employed in small parties, usually behind the enemy, on tasks beyond the normal scope of warfare in the field. There will be an increasing need for highly qualified and individually trained men—and women—to sabotage vital installations, to spread rumours, to misdirect the enemy, to transmit intelligence, to kill or kidnap individuals, and to inspire resistance movements.
>
> —William Slim, *Defeat into Victory*

While the exploits of special operations forces frequently play a central role in our popular culture's representations of war, the understanding of special operations is surprisingly incomplete. Defining what special operations forces are is a much more difficult task that defining what an army, navy, or air force is. The strategic utility of special operations seems obvious at first, such as the attempted hostage rescue in Iran. However, a deeper analysis shows that special operations are not magic bullets that can solve a strategic problem through individual great raids.[1] Only the most exceptionally fragile enemies will have a single point of failure, the destruction of which will end the war. Moreover, the return of insurgency, terrorism, and other irregular threats to the attention of the U.S. military has made theorizing about special operations both more clouded and vital.[2]

Writers usually define special operations by what they are not. They are not regular or orthodox. Even more substantive definitions are referential to the capabilities of conventional forces. The U.S. military's joint definition includes discussion about "employing military

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[1]James D. Kiras, *Special Operations and Strategy: From World War II to the War on Terror* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 76–82.

[2]Irregular threats are nothing new: Max Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare From Ancient Times to the Present* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013). On the confusion that irregulars cause modern militaries: Ian F. W. Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 213.

capabilities for which there is no broad conventional force requirement."[3] The strategic thinker Colin Gray identified a second related weakness of the current understanding of special operations—what is their usefulness in pursuing strategic purpose and which factors favor their success.[4] In Gray's assessment, "we are told in excruciating detail about the heroic deeds of [special operations forces], but we look in vain for other than casual judgments on the strategic utility of those deeds."[5] Moving toward a more useful theory of special operations that describes its strategic utility and the factors that favor success requires focusing on operational art. A theory of special operations needs to identify the characteristics that make special operations different and then how to effectively employ them. The essential characteristics emerge from the relationship of special operations to irregular warfare.

Irregular warfare has evolved to the point where it is a functionally different domain of war, possessing its own grammar that describes how tactical actions can achieve strategic purpose.[6] Irregular warfare is warfare dominated by institutionally weak combatants. Governments will develop forces specifically organized, trained, and equipped to contest the domain of irregular warfare. These are special operations forces. The characteristics, evolution, and strategic context of irregular warfare give rise to tenets of special operations theory that describe a complex of conditions and actions that favor successful operations. The theory organizes these nine tenets into three categories: physical access, cognitive access, and moral

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[3]Department of Defense, *JP 1-02 Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, vol. 2010 (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2011), 341.

[4]Colin S. Gray, "Handfuls of Heroes on Desperate Ventures: When do Special Operations Succeed?," *Parameters*, no. Spring (1999): 2–24.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Antulio J. Echevarria, "American Operational Art, 1917-2008," in *The Evolution of Operational Art*, ed. John Andreas Olsen and Martin Van Creveld (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 137–165.

access. These tenets imply that discipline, creativity, use of intelligence, and relative tactical superiority will characterize successful special operations forces.

This theory of special operations builds on the insights from the existing academic literature on special operations theory. A review of the strengths and weaknesses of this literature leads into the methodology used to formulate this theory of special operations. This methodology has two parts. First, it defines special operations forces in reference to a type or subset of the overall phenomenon of war. This type is irregular warfare. The study presents a theoretical understanding of the essential characteristic of irregular warfare—institutional strength. Then the study places irregular warfare in the context of the evolution of warfare. The study then analyzes the usefulness of this theoretical typology.

Second, this understanding of irregular warfare and special operations forces gives rise to the tenets of special operations operational art—the theory of how special operations can pursue strategic purpose. These tenets form a complex of factors that favor success. Finally, these tenets have consequences for how special operations forces should be organized, trained, equipped, and employed.

<u>Literature Review</u>

While most of the literature on special operations focuses on narratives of tactical actions, several authors have attempted to formulate a theory of special operations to describe how policy makers can use special operations to achieve strategic objectives. There are two major strands of these authors. The first follows the work of William McRaven and focuses on what current special operations doctrine calls direct action. The second strand comes from the Cold War era understanding of special operations, emphasizing guerrilla warfare. Colin Gray provides the most comprehensive recent exposition of this strand. Both strands have made significant contributions to the theoretical understanding of special operations, but there are still significant gaps.

One of the most influential works on the theory of Special Operations is Admiral William

McRaven's *Spec Ops: Case Studies in the Special Operations Warfare*. McRaven constructed a theory of special operations from eight case studies that he carefully researched. The resultant theory defines special operations as operations "conducted by forces specially trained, equipped, and supported for a specific target whose destruction, elimination, or rescue (in the case of hostages), is a political or military imperative."[7] There are additional characteristics that flow from this, including national level resources, attacks on fortified positions, small forces attacking large forces. By employing the principles that he derived from the eight case studies, a small force can temporarily mitigate the friction and chance of war to overcome a large enemy force in prepared defensive positions. By employing "simplicity, security, repetition, surprise, speed, and purpose," the smaller attacking force can achieve relative superiority, "a condition that exists when an attacking force, generally smaller, gains a decisive advantage over a larger or well-defended enemy."[8] The attackers must sustain this transitory relative superiority until they complete the mission. Because these special operations forces rely on speed and surprise, they are small and lightly equipped. Consequently, time is their enemy. If the attackers do not achieve their objective rapidly, the enemy will overwhelm them with mass.

This theory advanced the understanding of special operations, but it is fundamentally limited. Instead of being a theory of special operations, it is a tactical theory of direct action. McRaven acknowledged that his definition of special operations is akin to the U.S. military's definition of direct action instead of the broader concept of special operations.[9] It excludes a

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[7]William H. McRaven, *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1996), 2.

[8]Ibid, 4, 8.

[9]Robert G. Spulak, *A Theory of Special Operations* (Hurlburt Field, FL: Joint Special Operations University, 2007), 21; McRaven, *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice*, 2–3. The U.S. Joint Staff defines direct action as "short-duration strikes and other small-scale offensive actions conducted as a special operation in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments and which employ specialized military capabilities to seize,

number of military activities that the military commonly understands as fundamentally different from conventional operations such as guerrilla warfare. This exclusion reduces the usefulness of the theory. Moreover, as a fundamentally tactical theory, it does not address the operational art of special operations-how to employ special operations to achieve a strategic purpose. His definition of special operations took the choice of target as a given. The assumption avoids the question of how best to employ special operations forces.

James Kiras addresses this problem in his *Special Operations and Strategy.* Kiras argues against what he called the "great raid" perspective of special operations, a perspective into which McRaven's work can lead an unreflective reader. Based his study on special operations during World War II, Kiras averred that it is tempting but wrong to see special operations as "independently decisive."[10] Instead, militaries should conduct special operations in campaigns. They should be defined as "unconventional actions against enemy vulnerabilities in a sustained campaign, undertaken by specially designated units, to enable conventional operations and/or resolve economically politico-military problems at the operational or strategic level that are difficult or impossible to accomplish with conventional forces alone."[11] He elaborated that they are specially designated units doing what is different and unorthodox as opposed to elite units. The sustained campaigns should be oriented on supporting a strategy of attriting the enemy's moral and material strength. Kiras's research identified several potential pitfalls of using special operations: wasting valuable special operations forces on targets of minimal value or hoping that they are a kind of wonder weapon. Rather the best way to use special operations forces is to use

destroy, capture, exploit, recover, or damage designated targets." Department of Defense, *JP 1-02 Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, vol. 2010 (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2011), 110.

[10]James D. Kiras, *Special Operations and Strategy: From World War II to the War on Terror* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 4.

[11]Ibid, 5.

them in "unanticipated ways to inflict damage on key physical and psychological vulnerabilities to weaken enemy resolve and capabilities and further enhance strategic performance."[12] Special operations achieve a disproportionately large attrition of enemy moral and material strength for friendly combat power invested.[13]

Kiras's work is an invaluable contribution to the operational art of special operations because it clears away the myth that special operations are a magic bullet, but it is not the final answer because while he achieved his goal of illuminating some fallacies of special operations employment, his work does not provide a positive theory of special operations. Kiras's prescriptions for special operations, such as integrating them in sustained campaigns, using unanticipated ways to attack the enemy, and choosing targets to maximize the effect on the enemy are valuable for all military operations, not just special operations. Consequently, they do not describe what is unique about special operations. Moreover, Kiras overemphasizes the role of surprise on the operational and strategic levels.[14] Special operations may impose extra psychological stress on the enemy system at the beginning of a campaign by attacking from an unexpected direction, but a sustained campaign can hardly surprise the enemy in the long term. Similarly, Kiras's emphasis on the unconventional and unorthodox nature of special operations throughout his work weakens his definition of special operations because these terms are inherently relative to something that is conventional and orthodox. Defining special operations forces as different from conventional forces provides little guidance for how to organize, train, equip, and employ these forces. This is most apparent in his conclusion, where he fails to note

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[12]Ibid, 115.

[13]Ibid, 80.

[14]Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 198-201; Eliot Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 40-43.

after years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, most special operations tactics are orthodox.

Robert Spulak attempted to resolve this issue in his *A Theory of Special Operations*. Spulak, building on McRaven's insight about the relationship between special operations and friction, defines special operations as "missions to accomplish strategic objectives where the use of conventional forces would create unacceptable risks due to Clausewitzian friction."[15] He defines special operations forces as small forces composed of elite warriors that can harness creativity and flexibility to achieve their mission.[16] By selecting and training a relatively small group from the conventional forces, the military can create units with some of the best soldiers that can overcome friction through creative techniques and accomplish a wider range of military operations than conventional forces, which are constrained by their size in their ability to adapt to different ways of fighting.[17] The three characteristics that overcome what Spulak calls the ultimate sources of friction in war: "war is hell…we can't know what's out there…we can't predict what will happen."[18] Spulak provides historical examples of the missions that special operations forces can accomplish. However, this list shows examples of tactical success, especially in terms of direct action, instead of providing ideas for the operational art of special operations.[19] By only looking at successful cases, Spulak limited his ability to draw inferences about special operations forces because there is no variation in his dependent variable.[20] Nevertheless, Spulak made a major contribution by beginning his study by focusing on the forces

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[15]Robert G. Spulak, *A Theory of Special Operations* (Hurlburt Field, FL: Joint Special Operations University, 2007), 1.

[16]Ibid., 16–19.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid, 39-40.

[19]Ibid, 26-38.

[20]Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 129.

instead of the operations. Focusing on trying to define special operations led many analysts astray as they attempted to describe the specifics of special operations forces tactical employment. These specific forms of employment shift depending on the context of the specific conflict, leading to one of the central problems of defining special operations.

A second strand of writers has emphasized other aspects of special operations than the direct action tradition of McRaven, Kiras, and Spulak. The preeminent strategist Colin Gray provides a different approach to special operations that aligns with a more historical instead of theoretical approach to special operations. Gray wrote several works that address special operations. His 1999 article "Handful of Heroes on Desperate Ventures: When do Special Operations Succeed?" collects his numerous conclusions on effective special operations.[21] Several of these conclusions resonate with the later writings of Kiras and McRaven: avoiding the misuse of special operations and the tactical principles of special operations direct action. However, the general thrust of Gray's work is in a different direction than that of McRaven, Kiras, or Spulak. While he avoids proposing a specific definition of special operations, the nature of his discussion indicates that he sees special operations as consisting of guerrilla warfare and subversion as opposed to raids by elite infantry units.[22] In making this distinction, he draws on the historical perspective of the Cold War, provided by Alfred Paddock, when the military considered special operations to consist of guerrilla warfare, subversion, counterinsurgency, and psychological operations in response to the use of these tools by Communist governments to foment revolution around the world.[23] *Special Operations in US Strategy*, the result of a

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[21]Gray, "Handfuls of Heroes on Desperate Ventures: When do Special Operations Succeed?".

[22]Ibid, n21.

[23]Alfred Paddock, *U.S. Army Special Warfare: Its Origins* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1982), 2.

conference of the leading special operations thinkers and practitioners in March 1983, best

portrays the Cold War perspective on special operations.[24] The conference did not agree on a

single definition or theory of special operations, but several themes gained acceptance. The

extensive use of intelligence; "discriminate use of violence"; highly political nature; creativity,

imagination, and unorthodoxy; clandestine and covert actions; and small highly trained units all

characterize special operations.[25] The conference struggled with the sheer variety of special

operations in its efforts to come to a single agreement on what special operations are. While the

conference created an unsatisfying list of characteristics, falling prey to the trap that Spulak later

identified as focusing on specific tactics, the proceedings highlighted a crucial link between

special operations forces and a variety of activities that differentiate special operations forces

from conventional forces.

Gray's work includes the insights from the 1983 conference and other sources in a useful

list of what special operations need. This includes the need "to be assigned feasible objectives,

flexibility of mind, and particularly an unconventional mentality, to find and exploit enemy

vulnerabilities, technological assistance, tactical competence (preferably tactical excellence), a

reputation for effectiveness, a willingness to learn from history."[26] While this list is a useful

starting point to think about organizing and employing special operations, Gray argues the

fundamental weakness of the literature about special operations is that the literature's numerous

narrative histories do "little to advance understanding either of their utility in war as a whole, or

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[24]Frank R. Barnett, B. Hugh Tovar, and Richard H. Schultz, eds., *Special Operations in US Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1984).

[25]Ibid, 23-24, 34-35.

[26]Gray, "Handfuls of Heroes on Desperate Ventures: When do Special Operations Succeed?".

of the conditions that promote their strategic value."[27] The implication is that the proper scale or

level for a theory of special operations is the operational art of special operations—how to

arrange special operations to pursue the strategic purpose.[28]

Linda Robinson has made a contribution to the literature of special operations that lines

up with this second tradition and addresses elements of special operations operational art. Her

*Masters of Chaos* is a contemporary history of U.S. Special Forces since 1989 that focuses on

Afghanistan and Iraq.[29] In her conclusion, she discusses the direct and indirect framework of

special operations.[30] Using direct and indirect approaches, an element of operational art that

originated with B. H. Liddell Hart, this framework divides special operations into two types.[31]

Direct action is the direct approach, which in operational design aims directly at the enemy center

of gravity. In special operations, Robinson states that the direct approach is a "last-resort

alternative to remove a critical threat that has either gone undetected or proven impervious to

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[27]Ibid.

[28]Gray does not use the term operational art or other terms that the U.S. military associates with its current understanding of operational art. However, Gray's observation that a useful theory of special operations should describe how leaders can use tactical special operations to achieve "strategic value" maps onto the understanding of operational art as the "pursuit of strategic objectives, in whole or in part, through the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose" or "the use of creative thinking by commanders and staffs to design strategies, campaigns, and major operations and organize and employ military forces." Ibid.; Department of the Army, *ADP 3-0 Unified Land Operations* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government, 2011), 9; Department of Defense, *JP 3-0 Joint Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2011), xii.

[29]Linda Robinson, *Masters of Chaos: The Secret History of the Special Forces* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004).

[30]This is a framework that the U.S. military uses as a typology of special operations: Department of Defense, *JP 3-05 Special Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2011), I–2.

[31]Department of Defense, *JP 3-0 Joint Operations*; Department of the Army, *ADRP 3-0 Unified Land Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 2012).

other methods."[32] In contrast, the indirect approach focuses on "preventing or mitigating threats by working with local allies and using a variety of tools under the umbrella term unconventional warfare."[33] The current U.S. doctrine uses this framework for describing different special operations.[34] Robinson implies that it is preferable to use the indirect approach, resorting to the direct approach when the indirect fails. She also hints at several aspects of what makes special operations work, including less chance of a "backlash over heavy-handed tactics," the highly political nature of unconventional warfare, and interagency cooperation.[35] Robinson's work has spread the direct and indirect approaches framework outside of the special operations community, which enables a better understanding of what special operations are. However, recent experience and the particular history of the U.S. special operations forces bounds her work. These forces, a result of organizational processes over decades reflect bureaucratic pressures as much as the pressures of war. Consequently, arguing from the basis of the current force structure does not necessarily tell you something about the nature of warfare.

All of these authors have been able to clarify certain aspects of special operations. Although several authors have attempted to formulate a theory or operational art of special operations, the attempts have left gaps in the linkage of tactical special operational effects to strategic purpose—the utility of special operations. Several obstacles have hamstrung the study of special operations: the focus on great raids, an overreliance on a handful of dramatic direct action cases, an emphasis on defining the tactical aspects of special operations, and starting from the position of the current special operations forces. The literature points to several guides for

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[32]Robinson, *Masters of Chaos: The Secret History of the Special Forces*, 363.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Department of the Army, *ADP 3-05 Special Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 2012); Department of Defense, *JP 3-05 Special Operations*.

[35]Robinson, *Masters of Chaos: The Secret History of the Special Forces*, 359, 364.

developing a deeper understanding of special operations: focus on the forces, not the mission; theorizing at the level of operational art; and broadening the study beyond certain U.S.-centric cases. Following these guides to obviating these obstacles to understanding special operations requires a different methodology.

<u>Methodology</u>

This study's methodology consists of two parts. The first part seeks to construct a definition of special operations based on an analysis of the current state of warfare within the methodology of typological theory.[36] By creating a typology of warfare, the study seeks to provide a clear concept of what special operations are and are not. Gerhard Sharnhorst, the Prussian military officer and Carl von Clausewitz's mentor, taught that theorizing about war must start with "clear concepts and principles which clarify the links between the parts of war and the whole; these concepts and principles are necessarily based on the nature of things, and there is no knowledge without them."[37] Most authors who have studied special operations have attempted to define and theorize about the subject by inductively reasoning from a set of historical cases. This method has merit, but the problem of induction limits it.[38] They attempted to define special operations by what special operations forces did at a particular time and place. However, warfare is constantly changing, and the specific forms of organization are artifacts, produced by the contingency of history and oftentimes by factors and processes unrelated to war itself.[39] Defining

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[36]Alexander L. George and Alexander Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 233–262.

[37]Azar Gat, *A History of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 162.

[38]John Vickers, "The Problem of Induction," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2013, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/induction-problem/ (accessed 30 May 2013).

special operations in terms of the nature of warfare in the past may not provide a useful understanding of contemporary or future special operations. The historical accidents of U.S. law, policies, and organizational processes do not bind the phenomenon of war; nor should they limit our conceptual theorizing about war.

This study identified a qualitative difference in the forms of warfare from an historical analysis of the evolution of warfare over the past two centuries. Using John Stuart Mill's method of difference, it identified those characteristics that were fundamentally different between two different types of warfare.[40] This difference formed the basis for defining a functionally distinct domain of warfare. Having defined this domain, the theory defines special operations forces as forces designed to contesting that domain.[41] To assess the validity of the concept, the study assessed whether the concept described phenomenon of human experience, if it aligned with the historical evolution of warfare, and if it is useful for organizing and employing military force. In terms of policy-relevant theory, this first stage provides a "general conceptual model" and a "correct image of the adversary."[42]

The second section deductively derives a set of tenets of operational art for special operations from the dominant characteristics of the relevant domain. Because chance, friction, and the enemy all affect the progress of any military operation, making every war unique, these

[39]Carl von Clausewitz's *On War* states that the form of warfare changes depending on the historical context of each individual war: Clausewitz, *On War*, 585–594.

[40]John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic*, 8th ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 2009), http://www.gutenberg.org/files/27942/27942-pdf.pdf (accessed February 7, 2013), 483-488; Stephen Van Evra, *Guide to Mothods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 23.

[41]Following Spulak's insights, this theory focuses on defining special operations forces instead of special operations.

[42]George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, 270, 272.

tenets are not a set of directives that equal success.[43] Military theory, because it deals with the phenomenon of war, where there are immeasurable causal powers at play, cannot provide prediction like Newton's Three Laws of Motion can.[44] Rather this theory contains a set of principles of operational art that should guide the practitioner in understanding war and provide a starting point for the operational artist of special operations campaigns.[45] These principles are a guide for answering the questions that Gray identified: what is the utility of special operations and what conditions favor their success?[46] They are a complex of variables "that favor success," an important type of knowledge for policy-relevant theorizing.[47] The study then provides historical and theoretical evidence to support these tenets.[48]

## DEFINING SPECIAL OPERATIONS

One of the primary difficulties academics and practitioners have in defining special operations is clarifying what special operations are instead of what they are not. Most of the definitions rely on special operations being unconventional or unorthodox, which makes the definition dependent on what is conventional or orthodox. The definitions of conventional and

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[43]Clausewitz, *On War, 137-141*.

[44]Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2011).

[45]Clausewitz states that the purpose of theory is a guide to aid the military leader's self-study: Clausewitz, *On War*. The proposed tenets are a "causal complex" in Patrick Jackson's typological theory of epistemology: Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations*.

[46]Gray, "Handfuls of Heroes on Desperate Ventures: When do Special Operations Succeed?".

[47]George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, 272.

[48]The study presents macro-comparative evidence, following a methodology used by Stathis Kalyvas in his *The Logic of Violence in Civil Wars*: Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 210–245.

orthodox change by era and country.[49] The definition of special operations must be inherently

relative to the particular situation of a given state, the international system, and the evolving

nature of warfare. Contrasting special and conventional operations over the past sixty years

reveals a qualitative difference that provides a useful distinction. This time frame saw not only

the creation of formal special operations units, but also the acceleration of a trend that is centuries

old—the emergence of irregular warfare as a separate domain of warfare. The domains of warfare

refer to war on land, at sea, in the air, in space, or in cyber networks. The physical differences in

each of the domains gave rise to military forces tailored to each domain. The tactics and

operations in each domain are fundamentally different because the nature of sailing and flying are

fundamentally different from operating on land. These domains are intimately connected. Air and

land forces can both attack each other for example. Air and naval forces both require bases on

land and have limits in operational reach. On land however, warfare has developed into two

recognized forms: regular and irregular warfare.[50]

The United States Department of Defense defines irregular warfare as "a violent struggle

among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s)."[51]

Categorizing combatants on whether they meet the criteria of a Westphalian state instead of how

they fight limits this definition. However, an analysis of the historical development of irregular

warfare over the past three centuries, and especially the past sixty years reveals that the

fundamental difference between regular and irregular war is the combatants' institutional

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[49]Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 586.

[50]Irregular warfare is mostly but not wholly a land phenomenon. Naval forces have combatted maritime irregulars such as pirates for millennia, for example see: *Plutarch, Plutarch's Lives Volume II*, ed. Arthur Clough, trans. John Dryden (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 87-95.

[51]Gordon England, "DoD Directive 3000.07, Irregular Warfare" (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2008), 1, 11.

strength. The combatants' institutional weakness in irregular warfare gives rise to what Antulio Echevarria termed the "second grammar" of war.[52] In this second grammar, tactical effects interact to produce strategic outcomes differently than in the familiar first grammar, which describes how conventional operations achieve strategic purpose. Irregular warfare is combat dominated by the domain of weak institutions. Institutional weakness limits the level of control over the populace. Combatants in irregular warfare seek to maximize their control relative to their competitors.[53]

If irregular warfare is a functionally separate domain, then governments will create forces to contest that domain. Historically, governments have formed special or unconventional forces to solve a wide variety of problems. In response to the growing threat of irregulars, these forces and governments will increasingly focus on organizing forces to combat irregulars. At the current state of the evolution of warfare, it will be useful for states to possess forces specifically organized for irregular warfare. While governments organized these forces for other purposes in the past, it is useful to understand the fundamental contemporary nature of warfare, and its functional separation into regular and irregular varieties. Based on their historical use in resistance movements, insurgency, and other forms of irregular warfare, this theory states that it is useful to define special operations forces as forces organized for intervening in irregular warfare. The primary purpose of these forces designed for irregular warfare is to command that domain, just as the first purpose of air power is to command the air.[54] Until it has at least local control of the air, an air force cannot effectively affect ground combat. Therefore, special

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[52]Echevarria, "American Operational Art, 1917-2008."

[53]Kenneth Waltz describes the difference between conventional and irregular war as the difference between the processes of "conquering and governing." Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 2010), 191.

[54]Everett Carl Dolman, *Pure Strategy: Power and Principles in the Space and Information Age* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 34.

operations forces are military forces that are organized, trained, and equipped for irregular warfare, the domain of warfare dominated by weak institutions. A state may choose to use other military forces for irregular warfare, as most states have at one point or another.

This definition of irregular warfare and special operations overlaps with other theoretical and doctrinal debates about the domains of war. First, while the vast majority of irregular warfare occurs on land, irregulars do fight at sea and in the air. The most prominent recent example is Somali pirates.[55] However, their institutional weakness severely limits their operational reach in these domains. Second, recently, the U.S. military began a debate over a concept to synchronize efforts oriented on the people—the human domain. The human domain debate overlaps with the theory of special operations since that debate began as a discussion of incorporating special operations forces into what the U.S. Army calls the warfighting functions.[56] As Ken Gleiman argued, organizational dynamics fundamentally shaped these debates.[57] Although the integration of conventional and special operations forces is beyond the scope of this study, providing a sound theory of special operations can provide a new starting point for integrating all military forces.

To demonstrate the usefulness of this definition of special operations, it is necessary to describe how institutional strength gives rise to a different form of warfare, how this occurred over time, and how it provides increased clarity to the phenomenon of war.

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[55]Jay Bahadur, *The Pirates of Somalia: Inside Their Hidden World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011).

[56]Jan K. Gleiman, "Operational Art and the Clash of Organizational Cultures: Postmortem on Special Operations as a Seventh Warfighting Function" (MMAS thesis, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2011); Department of the Army, *ADP 3-0 Unified Land Operations*, 13–14.

[57]Gleiman, "Operational Art and the Clash of Organizational Cultures: Postmortem on Special Operations as a Seventh Warfighting Function," 60–64.

Irregular Warfare and Institutional Strength

Military forces are the institutions that societies use to wage war.[58] Institutions form the

basis for human communities, from the smallest group to a modern superpower. Institutions "are

the humanly devised constraints that structure human interaction. They are made up of formal

constraints (rules, laws, constitutions), informal constraints (norms of behavior, conventions, and

self-imposed codes of conduct), and their enforcement characteristics. Together they define the

incentive structure of societies."[59] A military institution is the set of formal and informal rules

that allow its members to interact to create combat power. The institution serves a common goal

by "constrain[ing] the behavior of all" members, incentivizing them to act in concert.[60] Some

military institutions are stronger than others, channeling more human activity towards a single

goal. For example, the governments of Austria-Hungry, France, Germany, and the United

Kingdom were able to extract far more resources, in blood and treasure, from their populations to

wage World War I than in any other previous war. For four bloody years they were able to

maintain sufficient domestic unity and military discipline to continue to feed young men into the

trenches. By contrast, most states in the world at that time could not have mobilized anywhere

near the same level of money, labor, or industrial output.[61] The nascent states of Africa for

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[58]This section parallels the argument put forth in William Harris, "Institutions at War," unpublished paper, Advanced Military Studies Program, 11 March 2013.

[59]Douglass C. North, "Economic Performance through Time" (Nobelprize.org, 1993), http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/economics/laureates/1993/north-lecture.html (accessed May 14, 2013).

[60]Gary M. Shiffman and James J. Jochum, *Economic Instruments of Security Policy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 18.

[61]Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1992).

example, could barely enforce the most basic decrees of the government outside the confines of the capital. This institutional weakness resulted in far weaker military forces.[62]

This weakness extends to all of the war fighting functions reducing the capability of these forces to maneuver, control, and sustain forces in combat. Consequently, these weak forces frequently use ambushes and raids as their preferred form of maneuver. Authors who discuss guerrilla warfare frequently mention that the forces appear, strike, and then disappear. The military institutions cannot support sustained operations. They choose ambushes out of necessity not choice. Mao Zedong, one of the acknowledged champions of guerrilla warfare, stated that guerrilla warfare was a temporary expedient until the conventional balance of power enabled the communists to take the offensive conventionally.[63] The example of Hizbollah, an irregular force that strengthened its institutions to the point where it could wage conventional defensive battles, adds further support to the idea that weak institutions choose guerrilla warfare out of necessity.

Tactically, the ability to resist force distinguishes institutionally strong combatants from institutionally weak combatants. In the physical sciences, the ability to resist shearing force distinguishes between the three primary phases of matter-solid, liquid, and gas. A solid has exponentially greater resistance to shearing force than a liquid, and a liquid greater than a gas.[64] Similarly, guerrillas, partisans, terrorists, and other irregulars have an exponentially weaker ability to defend terrain against military force. While irregulars can make life miserable for a

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[62]Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 130–133.

[63]Mao Zedong, *Problems of Strategy in Guerrilla War Against Japan* (Marxists.org, 1938), http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_08.htm (accessed 12 February 2013).

[64]Natalie Wolchover, "Solid or Liquid? Physicists Redefine States of Matter," *Simons Science News* (April 2013): 1–4, https://simonsfoundation.org/features/science-news/solid-or-liquid-physicists-redefine-states-of-matter/ (accessed May 1, 2013); F Sausset, G Biroli, and J Kurchan, "Do solids flow?," *arXiv* (June 2010): 1–10, http://arxiv.org/pdf/1001.0918.pdf (accessed May 1, 2013).

conventional army, they have minimal ability to deny terrain to a conventional army. The

irregulars may be able to deter the conventional army from occupying a piece of terrain because

the cost of clearing the terrain of irregulars is greater than the value of holding that terrain.

Nevertheless, the irregulars at best can only disrupt conventional forces in terrain that the

conventional forces value. The Russian partisans on the Eastern Front in World War II are an

example. They were able to occupy terrain that the Germans considered of minimal value and

disrupt the German lines of communication, but they could not prevent the Germans from seizing

key terrain.[65]

When opposing an institutionally stronger foe that operates in a more regular manner,

irregulars will refuse decisive battle and disappear into the wilderness or the population.[66]

Against other irregulars, they may attempt to defend terrain but will usually conform to a raiding

model because they cannot sustain combat for extended periods. Moreover, their institutional

weakness means that they have less capability to ensure their fighters will continue to fight in the

more lethal conditions of sustained close combat. Additionally, they are unable to guarantee their

fighters impunity. The soldiers of a regular army can show their affiliation in the open without

fear of arrest while irregulars lack the strength to protect their soldiers in this way.[67]

Irregulars' institutional weakness saps their potential combat power because they are

more inherently coalition units. Irregular forces have exponentially less political unity than

regular forces.[68] While institutionally strong combatants can convince soldiers from distant parts

[65]Earl F. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2002), 304–308.

[66]Walter Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical & Critical Study* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004), xvi.

[67]Geoff Demarest, *Winning Insurgent War* (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2011), 483–484.

[68]Ida Rudolfsen, *State Capacity, Inequality and Inter-group Violence in Sub-Saharan*

of their country to endure the horrendous conditions of Verdun or Stalingrad in a battle culture of

forbearance, irregulars are far less willing to endure sustained combat.[69] Weak military

institutions are less able to prevent undisciplined behavior such as fleeing the battlefield without

orders, refusing to advance under fire, refusing to endure privation, stealing supplies, choosing

sleep over delivering needed supplies to combat units, or abusing the civilian population. They

also are less effective at building tightly bound units whose soldiers desire the approbation of

their comrades and fear failing their brothers in arms. Weak institutions place fewer constraints

on individuals and are less effective at providing inducements. Consequently, they are less

effective at focusing individual efforts towards a collective goal. This limits irregulars' tactical

capabilities to short actions that quickly culminate. Additionally, it may destroy the group's

legitimacy with the population.

Operationally and strategically, the motley collection of individuals and small groups that

compose irregular forces are a coalition with widely divergent interests and strategic end states.[70]

Some irregular forces successfully meld these disparate groups into a more coherent whole by

steadily improving the institutional constraints on individual and group behavior. The Chinese

Communists, following Mao Zedong, steadily increased their control of their coalition of rebels

until they had developed the institutional capability to wage sustained conventional operations.

Mao Zedong specifically addressed the importance strengthening institutions in a revolutionary

*Africa* (Oslo, Norway: University of Oslo, 2013); Hanne Fjelde and Desiree Nilsson, "Rebels against Rebels: Explaining Violence between Rebel Groups," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 4 (2012): 604–628.

[69]Alistair Horne, *The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916* (London: Penguin Group, 1993); John Lynn, "Forging the Western Army in Seventeenth-century France," in *The Dynamics of Military Revolution, 1300-2050*, ed. MacGregor Knox and Williamson Murray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 35–56.

[70]Stathis N. Kalyvas, "The Ontology of 'Political Violence' Action and Identity in Civil Wars," *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 3 (September 2003): 475–494.

movement to obviate the deleterious of poor discipline and competing goals that institutional weakness entails.[71] Successful irregulars like Mao frequently succeed because they are able to consolidate their coalition into a tighter institutional framework through ideology, norm formation, and other social movement mechanisms.[72]

These groups are also more likely to fracture because they are pursing different strategic end states just as coalitions of states can fracture. One of the most common features of irregular war is fratricide amongst supposedly aligned irregular groups.[73] Irregular warfare is inherently local because weak institutions have minimal ability to build situational understanding in fractured populations. Instead, they build coalitions with various groups in an attempt to achieve their strategic goals. However, these coalitions are incredibly weak because each party has a poor understanding of the dynamics that influence other coalition members. They do not have the

[71]Mao Zedong, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Breiningville, PA: BN Publishers, 2007), 43, 54, 57, 82; Mao Zedong, *Problems of War and Strategy* (Marxists.org, 1938), 11, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_12.htm (accessed February 12, 2013); Mao Zedong, *Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War* (Marxists.org, 1936), 17, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_08.htm (accessed January 31, 2013); Zedong, *Problems of Strategy in Guerrilla War Against Japan*, 15–16.

[72]Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966); Donatella Della Porta, *Social Movements* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006); Eli Berman, *Radical, Religious, and Violent: The New Economics of Terrorism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009); Neil J. Smelser, *The Faces of Terrorism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Anthony C. Lopez, Rose McDermott, and Michael Bang Peterson, "States in Mind: Evolution, Coalitional Psychology, and International Politics," *International Security* 36, no. 2 (2011): 48–83.

[73]Jesse Driscoll, "Commitment Problems or Bidding Wars? Rebel Fragmentation as Peace Building," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (2012): 118–149; Seden Akcinaroglu, "Rebel Interdependencies and Civil War Outcomes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 5 (2012): 879-903; Wendy Pearlman and Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, "Nonstate Actors, Fragmentation, and Conflict Processes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (2012): 3-15; Fotini Christia, "Following the Money: Muslim versus Muslim in Bosnia's Civil War," *Comparative Politics* 40, no. 4 (July 2008): 461–480; Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, Kristin M Bakke, and Lee J M Seymour, "Shirts Today, Skins Tomorrow: Dual Contests and the Effects of Fragmentation in Self-Determination Disputes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (2012): 67-93.

physical or cognitive access to control groups.[74] Consequently, coalitions frequently fracture, with coalition partners fighting each other, undermining each other's positions, or making a separate peace. The

Some authors, such as Thomas Hammes, have argued that the decentralized insurgencies reflect a more advanced form of warfare than the United States' industrial age military.[75] However, institutionally weak combatants fight as decentralized networks because of necessity not desire.[76] Hezbollah's choice to transform into a more centralized hierarchical military force reflects the fact that denying Israel access to Lebanon requires conventional not guerrilla tactics and those conventional tactics require stronger institutions.[77] Jeffrey Record agrees that irregular warfare is not a new superior form of decentralized operations. Instead, irregulars only defeat regular opponents if they have "stronger political will, superior strategy, or external help."[78]

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[74]Kalyvas, "The Ontology of 'Political Violence' Action and Identity in Civil Wars"; Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*; Paul Staniland, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Insurgent Fratricide, Ethnic Defection, and the Rise of Pro-State Paramilitaries," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (February 15, 2012): 16-40; Paul S. Staniland, "Explaining Cohesion, Fragmentation, and Control in Insurgent Groups" (Phd diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2010).

[75]Thomas Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone* (Minneapolis, MN: Zenith Press, 2006).

[76]Jacob N. Shapiro and David A. Siegel, "Heterogeneous Motivations, Discipline, and the Management of Terrorist Organizations" (paper presented at the 2009 International Studies Association Meeting, New York, NY, 15-18 February, 2009).

[77]Augustus Richard Norton, *Hezbollah* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Nicholas Blanford, *Warriors of God* (New York: Random House, 2011). This argument echoes Mao Zedong's position that guerrilla warfare should be a transitional phase until the revolutionaries are ready for conventional warfare. Zedong, *On Guerrilla Warfare*; Mao Zedong, *On Protracted War* (Marxists.org, 1938), 46, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_09.htm (accessed 12 February 2013); Zedong, *Problems of War and Strategy*, 10.

[78]Jeffrey Record, *Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 2009), 132.

Irregulars' institutional weakness shapes the character of irregular warfare. Short-term offensive actions are the most frequent form of maneuver because irregulars lack the institutional strength to defend terrain against superior conventional militaries or sustain tactical action in width, depth, or over extended periods. Additionally, institutional weakness leads to compartmentalized and opaque human terrain because there is a lack of intelligence about the civilian population and other armed groups.[79] Finally, institutional weakness makes irregular warfare a form of armed political campaigning. Irregulars lack the ability to decisively conquer other groups, so they must build inherently unstable coalitions. These theoretical consequences of the nature of human institutions combine with the evolution of irregular warfare over human history.[80] Guerrilla and other varieties of irregular warfare have existed throughout human history.[81] However, the form of warfare in any given time is the result of an historical process. Several historical processes have given rise to irregular warfare as a functionally separate domain of war and shaped its nature and importance for future national security policy.

<u>The Evolution of Irregular Warfare and Special Operations</u>

Three broad trends combined to shape the nature of contemporary irregular warfare: the reaction to the increasing sophistication of high intensity industrial warfare, advances in the operational ability of irregular forces, and the changing nature of the international system. Together these three trends have made total state-on-state warfare less common, increased the

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[79]Martin Dimitrov and Joseph Sasoon, "Ensuring Compliance: Strategies for Popular Cooptation by the Party and State Security in Communist Europe and in Ba'athist Iraq," paper presented at Center for Peace and Security Studies, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., 20 January 2012.

[80]For an example of how historical processes shape the nature of warfare, see: Clausewitz, *On War*, 586–593.

[81]Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare From Ancient Times to the Present*.

effectiveness of irregular warfare, and increased the distance between regular and irregular operational art.

Increasing Sophistication of Industrial Warfare

Warfare evolved over the past three centuries, increasing in complexity, destructiveness, and scale. Numerous authors, debate the timing of modern warfare's emergence, but there is little doubt that it has evolved into something qualitatively different. Clausewitz argued that the Napoleonic wars had unleashed something new and approaching his theoretical construct absolute war.[82] Edward Hagermann pointed to the U.S. Civil War as the harbinger of the fully developed total wars of the two World Wars.[83] World War I brought warfare to new heights of destruction and totality as the warring states extracted more men and resources from their populations to wage war. Moreover, the complexity of the tactics and operations continued to increase. This complexity is a part of what Stephen Biddle calls the modern force employment, which emerged in the 1918 campaigns.[84] Complexity in the context of warfare is a measure of specialization. In commercial enterprise, the division of labor gives rise to specialization that increases the total wealth produced because specialization makes production more efficient.[85] In warfare, specialization enables militaries that are able to synchronize the increased complexity to wage combined arms warfare more effectively.[86] They are able to integrate different infantry

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[82]Clausewitz, *On War*.

[83]Edward Hagerman, *The American Civil War and the Origins of Modern Warfare* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988).

[84]Stephen Biddle, *Military Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 30–35.

[85]Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: The Modern Library, 1994), 12.

[86]Some theorists, influenced by complex adaptive systems theory aver that organizations that are more complex are more robust and adaptable. For example see: Frans Osinga, *Science, Strategy and War: The Strategic Theory of John Boyd* (London: Routledge, 2006), 114.

weapons, armor, artillery, air power, naval power, expeditionary logistics, intelligence, and a host of other human inventions to achieve the strategic purpose.

From the increased complexity of tactical formations in World War I, the belligerents in World War II increased the complexity of their forces even more. The evolution of the operational level of war and the recognition of operational art as distinct from tactics and strategy is another aspect of the overall increasing complexity of warfare. Soviet military theorists developed the idea of a distinct operational level of war in between tactics and strategy as a tool to command and synchronize operations in depth and vast distances. Western militaries adopted this construct in the 1980s together with a renewed emphasis on maneuver warfare.

This increasing complexity and institutional strength divided the world into combatants who could wage war effectively using this increasingly complex grammar of modern warfare and those who could not. The Persian Gulf War is a salient example of this divide. The mismatch between the abilities of the United States and Iraq to wage war convinced many countries that they could not compete with the United States in modern combined arms maneuver warfare.[87] Consequently, they sought ways to avoid the obvious U.S. strengths while still obtaining their strategic objectives. One of these ways was to focus on irregular warfare.

Advances in Irregular Warfare

While having an historical pedigree to the dawn of recorded history, irregular warfare has evolved over the past centuries.[88] The military experts during the Napoleonic era recognized the use of small detachments to harass the enemy's lines of communication and gather intelligence.

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[87]For example see Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare* (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, 1999), http://cryptome.org/cuw.zip (accessed 15 May 2013).

[88]Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare From Ancient Times to the Present*.

Military thinkers, including Clausewitz, who taught a class on guerrilla warfare, recognized that the soldiers of these small units required attributes such as greater individual initiative than regulars did.[89] The innovation in the Napoleonic Wars was the potential of waging war with the whole people in the form of an insurgency. The resistance movements against the French in Spain and in Tyrol are two examples.[90] Clausewitz proposed adopting this guerrilla policy in Prussia after the defeat of Prussia's conventional army.[91] This advice constituted a fundamental change from the conception of guerrilla warfare as a small adjunct to conventional forces to the possibility of a war amongst the people. The nascent potential was present in the American Revolution, although the leaders of the newborn state chose to avoid such a revolutionary strategy.[92]

Irregular warfare remained a secondary form of warfare for over a century. Although the Western colonial armies faced irregular opponents on a regular basis, their technological overmatch allowed them to achieve tactical victories even when vastly outnumbered.[93] As even

[89]Clausewitz stated that "'the individual Hussar or Jager has an enterprising spirit, a degree of self-reliance and faith in his own luck which is almost unimaginable to somebody who has always served in line [among the regulars]. In the light of his experience and customs, he feels calm and unruffled while carrying out diverse and difficult missions which would make a [regular soldier] very anxious.'" Beatrice Heuser, "Small Wars in the Age of Clausewitz: The Watershed Between Partisan War and People's War," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 33, no. 1 (February 2010): 139–162.

[90]David Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon* (New York: Scribner, 1966), 659-660; Christopher Daase, "Clausewitz and Small Wars," in *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, 2007, 21–23.

[91]Heuser, "Small Wars in the Age of Clausewitz: The Watershed Between Partisan War and People's War."

[92]John Shy, *A People Numerous & Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1990).

[93]Douglas Porch, "Bugeaud, Gallieni, Lyautey: The Development of French Colonial Warfare," in *Makers of Modern Strategy*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 376–407; Charles E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles & Practice* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

Karl Marx recognized, the state of technology gave a critical advantage to the counterinsurgents, who suppressed several revolts across Europe during the nineteenth century.[94] Nevertheless, irregulars continued to disrupt conventional forces. The U.S. Army's expeditionary force under Major General Winfield Scott in the Mexican War had to devote a quarter of its force to securing its lines of communication against guerrillas. [95] Scott's forces benefited from the unwillingness of the Mexican landowners to empower the lower classes by arming them.[96] The Mexican leaders chose to ally with their opponents who had limited aims instead of waging a revolutionary war.[97] Waging a revolutionary war would unleash social forces that would undermine the rule of the landed elite. The Parisian rulers of France made a similar choice after the disastrous French conventional defeats during the Franco-Prussian Wars. Although irregular *franc-tireurs* were harassing the Prussia Army occupying France, the government in Paris chose to negotiate rather than risk a total social revolution by empowering groups that they could not control and could desire a communist revolution of the masses.[98]

The Marxism that the rulers in Paris feared was a strengthening force that would strengthen the irregulars over time. These ideological components improved the revolutionaries' capabilities by enabling external assistance. Previously, most irregular wars were local affairs,

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[94]John Shy and Thomas Collier, "Revolutionary War," in *Makers of Modern Strategy*, ed. Peter Peret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 825-826.

[95]Irving W. Levinson, *Wars Within War: Mexican Guerrillas, Domestic Elites, and the United States of America* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 2005).

[96]Pedro Santoni, "A Fear of the People: The Civic Militia of Mexico in 1845," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 68, no. 2 (May 1988): 270; William A. Depalo, *The Mexican National Army, 1822-1852* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 139.

[97]Levinson, *Wars Within War: Mexican Guerrillas, Domestic Elites, and the United States of America*.

[98]Geoffrey Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870-1871* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

isolated from the rest of the world. The counterinsurgents could draw resources from the wider world while the insurgents could not. The failed revolts in the Vendee and Tyrol against Revolutionary France are two examples of isolated irregular forces, while the access to British support sustained the Spanish resistance to French rule.[99] The spread of a global ideology provided a medium for communicating ideas between different irregular groups. It encouraged irregulars to actually revolt, as in the 1848 revolts across Europe.[100] At the end of the century, a global anarchist movement successfully assassinated numerous national leaders around the world, including President William McKinley. The ideological umbrella of the anarchist movement provided a series of linkages across national borders that transmitted tactical and technical knowledge.[101]

After World War II, the global communist, anti-colonialist, and then the violent Salafist Islamist movements provided connections between disparate actors to transmit knowledge and motivation. These movements increased the external support to groups that otherwise would have been isolated. External support is a critical element for insurgencies.[102] Its increase over the past century has significantly increased the strength of irregulars combating regular forces.[103] In the past two decades, information technologies have also greatly strength the transnational connections that support irregulars. The internet, cell phones, social media, and modern finance

[99]Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical & Critical Study, 29, 39, 42*.

[100]Kurt Weyland, "The Diffusion of Revolution: '1848' in Europe and Latin America," *International Organization* 63, no. 3 (2009): 391–423.

[101]Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 6-9.

[102]Record, *Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win, 133*.

[103]Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson, "Rage against the Machines : Explaining Outcomes in Counterinsurgency Wars," *International Organization* 63, no. 1 (2009): 67–106.

have all made the provision of external support in the form of expertise, propaganda, motivation, and money far easier.[104]

Other technological changes have also strengthened the hand of irregulars. Since World War II the communications technology of irregular forces has improved, enabling irregulars to coordinate their disparate efforts more efficiently.[105] In the current Syrian war, the insurgents are using advanced anonymous cyber technology to improve their combat efficiency.[106] Whereas in past revolutionary conflicts, the regular forces had advantages in tactical communications, irregulars leveled the competition.

The status of weapons technology has increasingly favored the individual infantryman over the past decades. The amount of firepower that one soldier can wield has increased since World War II. Irregulars in World War II had basic anti-tank weapons and roadside bombs.[107] In the past sixty years, these technologies have advanced, giving individual fighters gains in relative combat power against armored vehicles and aircraft. Anti-tank rockets and missiles, developed by industrialized states for conventional war, have proliferated making armored vehicles more vulnerable to irregulars. Additionally, roadside bomb technology has advanced significantly over the past two decades. Hizbollah began developing new techniques against the Israeli Defense

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[104]Brian Petit, "Social Media and UW," *Special Warfare* 25, no. 2 (2012): 1–8; Hugh Ward and Peter John, "Competitive Learning in Yardstick Competition: Testing Models of Policy Diffusion With Performance Data," *Political Science Research and Methods* 1, no. 01 (June 12, 2013): 3-25.

[105]Shy and Collier, "Revolutionary War."

[106]Jay Newton-small, "Hillary's Little Startup: How the U.S. Is Using Technology to Aid Syria's Rebels," *Time*, June 2012, http://world.time.com/2012/06/13/hillarys-little-startup-how-the-u-s-is-using-technology-to-aid-syrias-rebels/ (accessed 20 June 2013).

[107]For example, guerrillas in Greece and Yugoslavia interdicted Axis lines of communication with roadside bombs: William Harris, *Instilling Aggressiveness: US Advisors and Greek Combat Leadership in the Greek Civil War, 1947-1949* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 2013).

Forces in the 1990s. Then the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan advanced these technologies much further, leaving all armored vehicles vulnerable to relatively cheap weapons. Armored vehicles remain crucial for conventional war. The Israeli's suffered badly in their 2006 war against Hizbollah in part because of their deficits in mechanized training. However, future weapons development will probably continue to favor firepower and the individual infantryman.[108] This will reinforce one of the characteristics of irregular warfare—the dominance of the offense at the tactical level. Guerrillas fight as guerrillas, refusing battle except on very favorable terms, because they lack the combat power to defend territory. This weakness of the defense is a direct result of their institutional weakness. Instead of defending ground, they disperse and hide. This leads to ambushes and raids as the dominant tactical form of maneuver in irregular warfare. Irregulars culminate too quickly to sustain combat when their opponents attempt to seize the initiative by attacking.

Irregular forces' technological and organizational changes made irregulars increasingly more effective over the past two centuries. While irregulars cannot compete conventionally unless they increase their institutional strength, the evolution of irregular warfare has advanced to the point where irregulars can coordinate tactical actions in time, space, and purpose.[109] Coeval with these irregular advances, the operational art of conventional warfare advanced, becoming far more complex. The advancement in conventional operational art resulted in a military equivalent of the "Matthew Effect," where those industrialized states that could practice modern operational art became stronger, while those states that were uncompetitive, lost the ability to compete

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[108]George Friedman and Meredith Friedman, *The Future of War* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998).

[109]The advances in irregular combat power enables them to coordinate actions in time, space, and purpose, but does not necessarily mean that they will conduct this coordination which is at the core of operational art's linkage of tactical actions to strategic purposes.

conventionally at all.[110] In the wake of the Gulf War, this has led some combatants to emphasize irregular operational art. Given the advances in the two separate types of operational art, it is useful to describe irregular warfare as a functionally separate domain of war. Concomitant with the rise in effectiveness and prevalence of irregular warfare, governments increasingly created more special operations units to combat the irregular threat.[111]

<div align="center">The Usefulness of the Definition</div>

Defining special operations forces as those units a state organizes, trains, and equips for irregular warfare, the domain of institutionally weak combatants has several advantages. First, it identifies the fundamental differences in different grammars of war that exist in the contemporary world.[112] This conceptual clarity explains phenomenon in the world, such as the decreasing effectiveness of conventional forces against irregulars.[113] Conventional forces, which are organized, trained, and equipped to wage the increasingly sophisticated warfare against institutionally strong opponents, are at a comparative disadvantage when facing institutionally weak opponents because of their specialization in the complexities of conventional warfare.

Second, the definition highlights the limitations of special operations. These forces have severe limitations in conventional warfare where the enemy's institutional strength enables it to

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[110]"For whoever has will be given more, and they will have abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them." Matthew 25:29, New International Version.

[111]Christopher Marsh, "The Rise of SOF Power," paper presented at the Midwest ISA Conference, St. Louis, MO, November 7-8 2013. Marsh argues that, following Waltz, international relations theory predicts that military innovations will diffuse around the world as states adapt to the threats they face. Cf. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 127.

[112]Providing this conceptual clarity is one of the requirements for policy-relevant studies according to George and Bennett: George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, 270-272.

[113]Lyall and Wilson, "Rage against the Machines : Explaining Outcomes in Counterinsurgency Wars."

wage sustained combat that irregulars cannot endure. Even in mostly conventional wars, special operations forces were successful around the edges, where the enemy's weaknesses provided openings. For example, in World War II the Allies were able to use special operations in territory occupied by the Germans, but not in Germany. In the occupied territories, the Germans lacked access to the situation, allowing some allied special operations forces to work in the shadows. To be successful, special operations forces must satisfy requirements for physically accessing the terrain where irregulars are fighting, cognitively accessing the opaque situation, and having the moral access to build legitimacy.

This leads to the third benefit of this definition. It provides characteristics from which a theory of victory in irregular warfare can flow. Irregular warfare is functionally different because of the institutional weakness of the combatants. Five fundamental characteristics differentiate irregular warfare from its conventional sibling. First, the institutional weakness means that the institutions face a severe limit in their ability to exert control over distance.[114] They have a very steep gradient to their operational reach because of the fundamentally local nature of irregular warfare.[115] The physical and cognitive compartmentalization of irregular warfare limits the control over distance. Second, the institutional weakness leads to the dominance of short-term offensives at the tactical level. Defense is only feasible against weak attacks.

There is an important caveat to this limited operational reach is the ability of transnational terrorists to conduct direct action on a global scale. The 11 September 2001 attacks are the most prominent example. These attacks and other similar attacks poignantly demonstrate how globalization, increased border permeability, and improved irregular organizational skills are more lethal now than at any point in world history. However, while these terrorists and other

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[114]Joshua R. Gubler and Joel Sawat Selway, "Horizontal Inequality, Crosscutting Cleavages, and Civil War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 2 (2012): 206–232.

[115]Herbst, *States and Power in Africa*.

irregulars have increased strike capabilities for short-term tactical actions, their institutional weakness and the compartmentalized human terrain still limit their ability to control territory and populations.

Third, the tactical and strategic levels of war are very close in irregular warfare. While the strategic and tactical levels have spread out in conventional warfare since the Napoleonic Wars, leaving a widening gap requiring the formal study of the operational level of war, in irregular warfare there is a very small gap between the tactical and strategic levels. This is a direct result of the fact that the institutionally weak combatants have less ability to force the other actors in their coalition to subordinate those actors' personal preferences to the collective goal.[116] Consequently, these other actors, village elders, landowners, gangs, warlords, etc. are pursuing their own strategic end states. The special operators who intervene in irregular warfare are far from the strategic level of their own state, but they are directly acting on the strategic level of the local actors.

Fourth, this leads to the conclusion that the operational art of irregular warfare is violent competitive coalition building. The actors are building alliances and coalitions. They are running armed political campaigns to gain the willing support of an increasing percentage of the population. They use war as "a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse."[117] Fighting is an integral part of the equation, but it should be subordinate to the political campaign.[118]

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[116]Staniland, "Explaining Cohesion, Fragmentation, and Control in Insurgent Groups"; Staniland, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Insurgent Fratricide, Ethnic Defection, and the Rise of Pro-State Paramilitaries."

[117]Clausewitz, *On War*, 87.

[118]Ibid., 88-89, 90-99.

Fifth, intervening powers face a mismatch in types of war. Many of the local actors in the theater are waging a total war, while the external actors are waging an inherently limited conflict.[119] This difference leads to a political sensitivity to costs by the external actors that the locals may not face. This political sensitivity places unique requirements on the special operations campaign, such as avoiding entrapment in the conflict.

These five characteristics form the basis of the tenets of special operations operational art in the next section. Before advancing, however, it is useful to address potential counterarguments to the typology presented here. One counterargument to this definition is that it excludes several types of operations that many associate with special operations. First, it excludes several great raids that the histories of special operations frequently discuss.[120] The problem with this argument is that it overstates the military utility of these great raids. While many of these raids are examples of elite forces and incredible courage, there are very few points in modern warfare where a single tactical action can achieve strategic effects.[121] As states developed modern operational art, they increased their resiliency to the point where there are no single points of failure. The only potential partial exception to this relates to weapons of mass destruction, when those resources are centralized. However, states like Iran have learned that they must disperse their nuclear, biological, and chemical capability to ensure survivability.

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[119]Ivan Arreguín-toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict," *International Security* 26, no. 1 (2001): 93–128; Michael T. Koch and Patricia Sullivan, "Should I Stay or Should I Go Now? Partisanship, Approval, and the Duration of Major Power Democratic Military Interventions," *The Journal of Politics* 72, no. 3 (2010): 616-629; Erin Marie Simpson, "The Perils of Third-Party Counterinsurgency Campaigns" (Ph.d. diss., Harvard University, 2010).

[120]For example, see: McRaven, *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice*.

[121]Kiras, *Special Operations and Strategy: From World War II to the War on Terror*, 78–82.

Second, some special operations, such as Operation Eagle Claw and the raid on Entebbe, do not seem to fit neatly within the idea of irregular warfare. They appear to be *coup-de-mains*, sometimes against the regular forces of an opposing state. These operations differ from conventional operations because they are still in the domain of institutionally weak adversaries. If Iran was not just emerging from the throes of a revolution and had the competent air defenses of an institutionally strong state, then Operational Eagle Claw would not have been feasible. Similarly, the raid on Entebbe was only feasibly because Uganda did not have the combat power to resist the Israeli attack. If the hijackers had taken the hostages to Syria, the mission would not have been feasible because the Syrian military presented a serious conventional threat even though Syria is much closer than Uganda.

This definition does not privilege special warfare over surgical strike, a dichotomy that current United States Army Special Operations doctrine makes. In this dichotomy, special warfare consists of operations that primarily work by, with, and through indigenous forces while surgical strike consists of direct action operations that are high-risk or politically sensitive.[122] Both of these tactical capabilities may be required to effectively contest the domain of irregular warfare.

Another counterargument is that the conventional, general-purpose forces are involved in irregular warfare, specifically counterinsurgency. Moreover, one of the lessons of the invasion of Iraq appears to be the importance of planning for counterinsurgency operations after the defeat of the enemy's conventional force. The answer is that while conventional forces will have to engage irregulars, especially after a war and to secure their rear areas, the raison d'etre of the conventional forces is prevailing in land operations against conventional militaries, a task for which special operations forces are wholly unsuited. The conventional forces must devote

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[122]Department of the Army, *ADP 3-05 Special Operatins* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 2012), 8.

significant time and resources to proficiency at the conventional operational and tactical art, tasks which have become much more complicated since the Napoleonic Wars. That leaves less time for mastering the operational art of irregular warfare, which has also increased in sophistication since the Napoleonic Wars. In the 1973 October War, the Egyptians were able to mitigate their weakness in the air domain of the war against Israel through a very sophisticated Soviet air defense system. This Egyptian effort did not dominate the air domain; they denied it as a line of operation into their rear area. Similarly, conventional forces dedicated to conventional war militate against the deleterious effects of irregulars, but they are less capable of successfully contesting the domain of irregular institutionally weak combatants. Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson demonstrated that the effectiveness of conventional militaries against insurgents decreased as they mechanized because mechanization dramatically reduces ratio of intelligence per soldier.[123]

## TENETS OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS OPERATIONAL ART

Irregular warfare's inherent characteristics give rise to a particular set of tenets for the operational art of special operations. Modern operational art arose from a set of factors that define modern conventional warfare. These include the institutional strength of industrialized states and modern technology that led to the vast scale and complexity of modern conventional warfare. Unable to compete with modern states in conventional warfare, institutionally weak combatants have improved a second grammar. Special operations forces, those forces specifically designed to contest the domain of irregular warfare in foreign countries require an operational art tailored to the characteristics of the irregular warfare domain. These characteristics, the difficulty of projecting power over distance, the advantage of the tactical offensive, the proximity of the strategic and tactical levels, and warfare as armed coalition building give rise to a potential

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[123]Lyall and Wilson, "Rage against the Machines : Explaining Outcomes in Counterinsurgency Wars."

operational art based around the problem of access. The graphic below depicts the relationship between irregular warfare, special operations operational art, and special operations forces.

**Characteristics of Irregular Warfare**

Weak power over distance

Short-term tactical offensive

Proximity of tactical & strategic levels

Armed coalition building

Total and limited mis-match

**Tenets of Special Operations Operational Art**

Physical Access
  insertion
  sustainment
  Isolation

Cognitive Access
  Defensive Intelligence
  Offensive Intelligence
  Political Intelligence

Moral Access
  Negotiating position
  Legitimacy
  Divide the enemy coalition

Organized for irregular warfare, small teams, maximize intelligence, creative, disciplined, relative tactical superiority

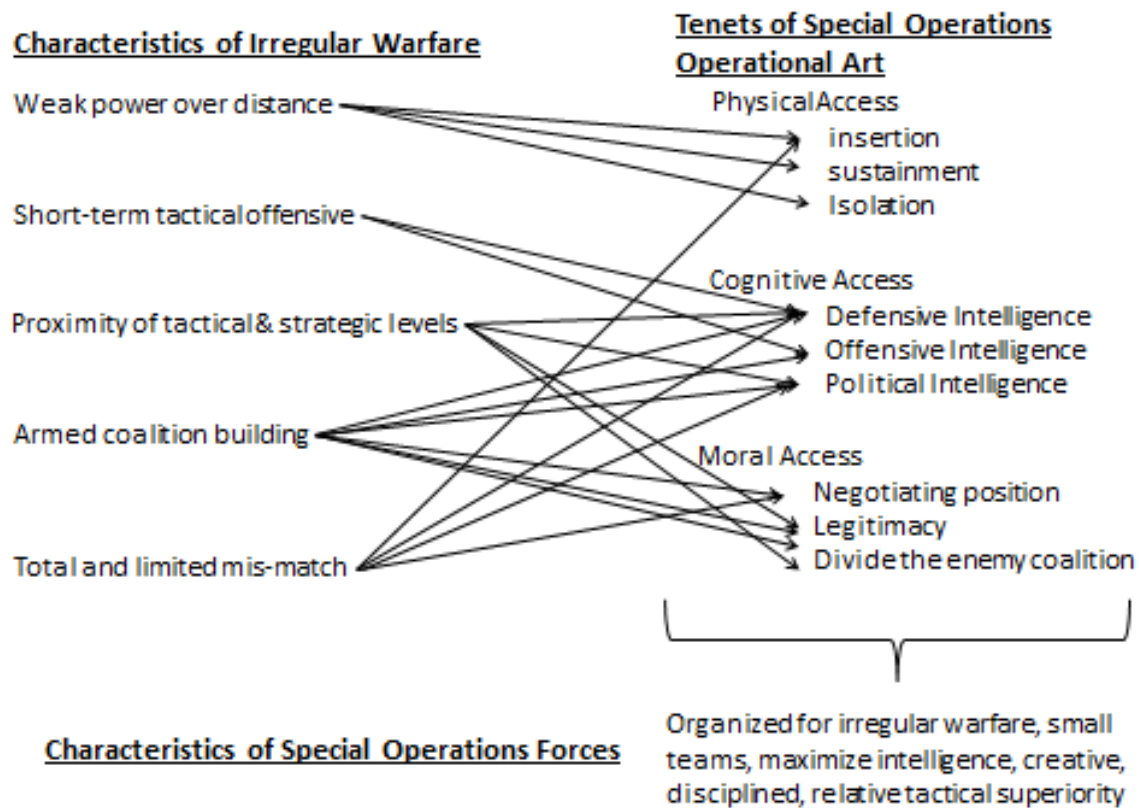**Characteristics of Special Operations Forces**

Figure 1. From the Characteristics of Irregular Warfare to Special Operations Operational Art and Forces

Conventional forces gain access through projecting brute power within their operational reach and impose a peace by disarming the adversary.[124] The fundamental problems for conventional forces revolve around initiative and synchronizing combined arms maneuver in time, space, and

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[124]Clausewitz, *On War*, 77.

purpose.[125] The fundamental operational problem for special operations forces is how to gain physical, cognitive, and moral access necessary to achieve the strategic objective because the characteristics of irregular warfare deny these three forms of access.[126] Each of these three major components of the operational art contains subordinate tenets that constitute a theory of special operations.

Physical, cognitive, and moral access all provide the special operations forces with a position of relative advantage, an operational art concept that corresponds with McRaven's tactical theory of relative superiority.[127] This idea of position is similar to Sun Tzu's idea of strategic advantage flowing from a strategic position.[128] From a position of continuing relative advantage, the special operations forces can influence the relevant audiences, their local allies, the neutral population, and the enemy through lethal and non-lethal means to accept the U.S. strategic objective. To seize this position of advantage, the special operations forces should design a campaign in which each tactical action steadily expands the campaign's physical, cognitive, and moral access over time.[129] Simultaneously, the campaign should deny the enemy the initiative or

[125]Department of the Army, *ADP 3-0 Unified Land Operations*, 5–8.

[126]The physical, cognitive, moral aspects framework is parallel two other models. Clausewitz describes physical and moral factors in war. He divides the moral factors into intellectual, emotional, and psychological elements, which overlap the cognitive and moral dimensions in this model: Clausewitz, *On War*, 136–139. John Boyd uses a moral-mental-physical model that derives from his understanding of different ways of warfare: Osinga, *Science, Strategy and War: The Strategic Theory of John Boyd*, 214.

[127]McRaven, *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice*. The U.S. Army's understanding of operational art includes the gaining and maintaining of a position of relative advantage in its definition of unified land operations: Department of the Army, *ADP 3-0 Unified Land Operations*.

[128]Sun Tzu, *Sun Tzu: The Art of Warfare*, ed. Roger Ames, trans. Roger Ames (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993); Roger Ames, "Introduction," in *Sun Tzu: The Art of Warfare*, ed. Roger Ames (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 82.

[129]The proximity of the strategic and tactical levels means that the nature of strategy has more of an immediate impact on special operations operational art.

advantage in any of these types of access to the opaque and compartmentalized human and physical terrain where irregulars tend to fight.[130] The proximity of the strategic and tactical levels in irregular warfare means that the nature of strategy should have a greater influence on special operations operational art than conventional operational art. Consequently, the idea of continuation, which Everett Dolman avers is central to strategy, has a strong influence.[131] Special operations campaigns should steadily improve their position of advantage like a political party attempts to steadily improve its influence in the population. The campaign should seek continual expansion of access to and influence over the population by arranging tactical actions along each of the tenets.

<center>Physical Access</center>

Projecting military force into the theater of operations is one of the most difficult military tasks, as the current debates over emerging anti-access threats attest.[132] Physical access is the ability to place and maintain combat power in a theater of operations. For the operational art of special operations, the conflict's political sensitivity complicates physical access, leading to a small force size. The initial insertion of forces can be difficult, but it can be easier than sustaining those forces. Additionally, there is an offensive component to physical access--isolating the theater to deny physical access to the enemy.

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[130]The ideas of complex adaptive systems informed this argument. Cf. Osinga, *Science, Strategy and War: The Strategic Theory of John Boyd*; Yaneer Bar-Yam, *Making Things Work: Solving Complex Problems in a Complex World* (Cambridge, MA: NECSI Knowledge Press, 2004).

[131]Dolman, *Pure Strategy: Power and Principles in the Space and Information Age*, 4. Dolman's position parallels B. H. Liddell Hart's description of grand strategy (which is the same as the U.S. military's current usage of strategy) as seeking a better peace. Harts ideas on grand strategy also inform the ideas of moral access below. B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Meridian, 1991), 353.

[132]Department of Defense, *Joint Operational Access Concept* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2012).

Insertion

Insertion is the projection of special operators into the theater of operations. Special operations practitioners and theorists have long recognized that insertion represents one of the key problems for conducting special operations. Many contemporary special operations units around the world are in large part defined by specialized insertion methods. Writers, such as Richard Harris in his history of the Office of Strategic Services, have frequently emphasized various methods such as parachuting as one of the defining characteristics of special operations.[133] The current U.S. Army Special Forces frequently differentiate between different detachments by those detachments' specialized insertion methods such as free-fall parachuting, SCUBA, or mountaineering. Insertion is a critical component of the operational art because of two factors. First, the political sensitivity of the conflict frequently requires a low-visibility or clandestine projection of military forces. Operation Eagle Claw may be the best-known example of this condition. Second, special operations usually occur in physically and cognitively compartmentalized terrain.[134] This may be because it is behind enemy lines, such as support to the French resistance during World War II.[135] Alternatively, the operation could be in difficult to reach places where the terrain severely limits operationally reach. The mountainous terrain of Afghanistan presented severe physical limitations on operational reach for the special operators

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[133]Richard Harris Smtih, *OSS: The Secret History of America's First Central Intelligence Agency* (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2005).

[134]Joseph Royo describes these conditions as unlit terrain and examines the planning considerations for conducting special operations in these types of terrain. Joseph Royo, "SOF In Unlit Spaces: Understanding the World's Dark Spots in the Context of SOF Operational Planning" (MMAS thesis, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2013).

[135]Will Irwin, *The Jedburghs* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2005).

during Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001, while the fragmented human terrain of Somalia limits physical access.[136] Limits to physical access lead to limited cognitive access.

Both factors, the political sensitivity and the difficult physical and human terrain, emphasize the importance of physical access and insertion to the theater. These conditions lead to the requirement for small teams that can employ low-visibility, complex, or unique insertion methods to enter the theater of operations. There is a high level of operational risk because the insertions have many potential points of failure. There were numerous failed insertions for the Jedburghs in World War II because German counterintelligence compromised the insertion infrastructure.[137] Organizational weaknesses, chance, and the inherent difficulties of insertion combined to cause mission failure in Operation Eagle Claw. [138] As difficult as insertion is, sustaining physical access can frequently be more difficult.

## Sustainment

Sustainment is the maintenance of continued physical access to the theater of operations. The tactical actions of special operations are short duration because special operations forces and irregulars do not have the ability to defend terrain. The short-term tactical offensive dominates in irregular warfare, hence the historical prominence of ambushes and raids. However, the operational art of special operations requires a sustained effort because of the lack of strategic decisiveness. While the offense dominates tactical actions, which should be as decisive as possible, these actions are inherently a part of a long campaign of attrition.[139] Consequently, the

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[136]Royo, "SOF In Unlit Spaces: Understanding the World's Dark Spots in the Context of SOF Operational Planning."

[137]Irwin, *The Jedburghs*.

[138]Special Operations Review Group, *Rescue Mission Report* (Washington, D.C., 1980), http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/hollowayrpt.htm (accessed 5 May 2013).

[139]James D. Kiras, "Special Operations and Strategies of Attrition," *Infinity* 2, no. 4

campaign plan must account for maintaining physical access. There are two components to this requirement.

First, the plan must be able to repeatedly conduct insertion to provide additional operators and logistical support. This component requires the campaign to have a link that can project this support into the theater. This link carries the same difficulties as the original insertion, although the improved cognitive access that comes from having operators in the theater mitigates some of the problems of difficult human and physical terrain. A good example of this component is the sustained operations of the British and United States forces in Greece and Yugoslavia during World War II. The Special Operations Executive, the Secret Intelligence Service, and the Office of Strategic Services supported small teams through continued aerial delivery of additional forces and logistics. After the initial teams were in place, they helped develop mechanisms for sustained insertion.[140]

Second, these forces must be able to survive in the theater of operations. Since small teams and irregulars have significant difficulties on the defense, force protection is a major problem. This is especially the case when acting as insurgents against a modern conventional opponent. The German army on the Eastern Front in World War II was able to defeat any Russian partisans that attempted to defend territory.[141] In the China-Burma-India Theater, the Special Force, an Anglo-Indian special operations units frequently referred to as the Chindits, were unable to sustain their operation behind Japanese lines. The Chindits inserted a brigade-sized element, which the Japanese easily located and attacked since it lacked the support that regular

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(2012): 18–21.

[140]Michael Adorjan, "Lost Unconventional Warfare Lessons from the Yugoslav Front" (MMAS thesis, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2012).

[141]Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East*, 304.

infantry units routinely enjoyed such as artillery.[142] As the force's size increases, its logistics, insertion, tactical mobility, and ability to hide from enemy intelligence become exponentially more difficult. A conventional force overcomes this through its tactical resilience and ability to hold ground. An irregular force, and hence a special operations unit engaged in irregular warfare, cannot hold ground except against an institutionally weak adversary. Sustaining physical access therefore requires that units should be as small as possible. In contrast to the Chindits and in the same theater, Detachment 101 of the Office of Strategic Services sustained numerous small teams behind Japanese lines. These teams built a coalition with Kachin tribes, raising over ten thousand fighters and providing the majority of the targeting intelligence to the Allied campaigns.[143]

## Isolate the Theater

As numerous authors and the evolution of irregular warfare section argue, external support is one of the critical factors in irregular warfare. Anthony Joes, for example, states that to be successful, counterinsurgents must "isolate the conflict area."[144] Denying this external support means denying physical access to the theater to external actors seeking to assist the enemy. Without this external support, irregulars are more vulnerable to attrition and exhaustion because their institutional weakness prevents them from efficiently extracting resources from the population. The most complete isolation of the theater usually requires conventional combat power that can hold terrain, like the French used to establish their Maurice Line to severe the Algerian insurgents' lines of communication.[145]

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[142]Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, 56.

[143]Troy Sacquety, *The OSS in Burma: Jugle War Against the Japanese* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2013), 158.

[144]Anthony James Joes, *Resisting Rebellion* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 236.

[145]Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace* (New York: New York Review Books, 2006).

Short of this type of conventional commitment, a country can take numerous tactical efforts to isolate the theater. Its special operators can conduct unilateral or combined direct action against the lines of communication or safe havens. The Military Assistance Command—Vietnam, Studies and Observation Group conducted these types of operations during the Vietnam War.[146] Alternatively, the campaign can leverage the economic, diplomatic, and informational strength of the United States government to target the external links between an irregular force in one country and potential external supporters. For example, the global Countering Financing of Terrorism/anti-money laundering efforts interdicts financial support to Islamist terrorists around the world.[147] This supports the special operations campaigns in countries like the Philippines, where United States special operators work with the Philippine security forces to pacify areas dominated by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Abu Sayyaf, and Jemaah Islamiyah.[148] Conventional military forces, frequently naval or air forces, can also support the special operations campaign by interdicting the lines of communication. The United States Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard use their conventional capabilities to interdict the lines of communication for the narcotics trafficking organizations that are waging an irregular war to undermine the governments of Mexico and Latin American states.[149]

Because isolating the theater is inherently oriented outside of the theater, the special operations campaign, including the efforts of other government entities, may play a relatively

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[146]John L. Plaster, *SOG: Secret Wars of America's Commandos in Vietnam* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

[147]Paul Allan Schott, *Reference Guide to Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2006).

[148]Brian Petit, "OEF-Philippines: Thinking COIN, Practicing FID," *Special Warfare* 23, no. 1 (2010): 10–16.

[149]"US military expands its drug war in Latin America," *Washington Guardian*, February 3, 2013, http://www.washingtonguardian.com/us-military-expands-its-drug-war-latin-america (accessed 15 June 2013).

greater role than the operators in the target country may. However, the efforts to isolate the theater should not undermine the moral access. Specifically, it should not weaken the incentive for the indigenous partners to develop their own isolation capabilities nor should it entrap the United States into a weak negotiating position with its partners.

## Cognitive Access

Cognitive access is the understanding of the physical, human, and enemy situations. It is the collection and understanding of intelligence, specifically defensive, offensive, and political intelligence. All of the characteristics of irregular warfare make it an intelligence-centric activity. Poor intelligence contributes to the steep drop in power over distance. The tactical dominance of the offensive places a premium on defensive intelligence. The proximity of the strategic and tactical levels and armed coalition building reward those with the best offensive and political intelligence. The failure to build superiority in cognitive access over time can lead to the overall failure of the campaign. For example, the German intelligence and subversion campaign in the United Kingdom failed because the British exploited a massive cognitive access superiority to undermine the entire German organization in Britain.[150] The British were unable, however, to establish an organization inside Germany because of the efficient German counterintelligence inside Germany.[151] This is in stark contrast to other theaters such as France and Greece where the British and U.S. special operations forces were able to establish cognitive access.[152]

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[150]John C. Masterman, *The Double Cross System* (Ithaca, NY: Yale University Press, 1972).

[151]F. H. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations, Volume Two* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 125.

[152]Irwin, *The Jedburghs*; Harris, *Instilling Aggressiveness: US Advisors and Greek Combat Leadership in the Greek Civil War, 1947-1949*.

Defensive Intelligence

Most irregulars overcome the offense dominance at the tactical level through a defense of avoidance. They hide and refuse battle except on favorable terms. This is the time-tested method of guerrilla warfare.[153] Special operators, since they operate in small teams, should do the same. However, hiding is insufficient. This is because of two reasons. First, the political sensitivity of the conflict may mean that the intervening country that is deploying its special operators to an irregular conflict is attempting to achieve a national security objective without a high cost in blood or treasure. The operators must improve their probability of survival by developing a defensive intelligence capability to provide early warning and avert betrayal, which is a fundamental concern of irregular warfare.[154] Moreover, the operators, especially when they are supporting an insurgency or other purely irregular force instead of the counterinsurgents, may lose indigenous allies and their budding coalition if those partners suffer too many casualties.[155] The Red Brigades in Italy are an example of an organization where the membership quietly faded away despite external support as the Italian security services captured a significant proportion of the organization's leadership.[156] The United States' OP34A program during the Vietnam War, which was the command responsible for infiltrating agents into North Vietnam to conduct unconventional warfare, failed to achieve any effective cognitive access. The very efficient North

[153]Zedong, *On Guerrilla Warfare*; Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical & Critical Study*; Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare From Ancient Times to the Present*.

[154]Department of the Army, *FM 3-05.130 Army Special Operations Forces Unconventional Warfare* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 2008), 4-4.

[155]This is not always the case. For example, the high level of casualties suffered by the Syrian rebels has led to the continuation and escalation of the war as the sacrifices incurred generate.

[156]Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism, 78*.

Vietnamese security services enjoyed tight control over the population, a fact they exploited to kill or capture every one of the more than 500 personnel inserted into North Vietnam.[157]

## Offensive Intelligence

The operations must also have the ability to collect and employ offensive intelligence. While this may seem an obvious point, irregular warfare makes some particular demands of offensive intelligence. First, the imperative to minimize casualties requires well-planned attacks with adequate intelligence to ensure the attackers can achieve relative superiority, accomplish their mission, and then withdraw.[158] An example of the use of offensive intelligence is the Son Tay raid during the Vietnam War. The U.S. military developed a plan to liberate prisoner of war at the Son Tay prison camp.[159] The raid succeeded in securing the objective in large part because superior intelligence had enabled the raiders to rehearse a very strong tactical plan. The intelligence failed, however, to indicate that the North Vietnamese had evacuated the prisoners because of flooding.[160] This raid is a good example of how vital accurate and timely offensive intelligence is to special operations. The intelligence to support this capability over time is an operational level capability that must continually grow to support a continued campaign to exhaust the enemy.

Second, against a weaker irregular force that relies on avoiding battle instead of defending positions, the operators must develop an offensive intelligence capability that can find enemy fighters with sufficient time to enable a strike. Again, the operational art requires an

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[157] Richard H. Shultz, *The Secret War Against Hanoi* (New York: Perennial, 1999), 58.

[158] McRaven, *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice*, 4-13.

[159] Benjamin Schemmer, *The Raid* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

[160] Ibid.

operational level capability to support offensive strikes over time. In the Vietnam War, the Phoenix Program was an example of this kind of operational level capability. The Phoenix Program integrated a significant intelligence operation with direct action to destroy the Viet-Cong infrastructure, the insurgent leaders that ran the insurgency in South Vietnam.[161]

Third, in irregular war precise violence is extremely valuable while indiscriminate violence is counterproductive. If an irregular force with special operators omits the requirement for employing its violence discriminately, it will undermine its moral access and convince potential informers that the enemy is the better ally because they have a better intelligence mechanism.[162] The ability to precisely deliver violence avoids generating a need for vengeance and communicates to the population that you have superior intelligence. That means that you may be more capable of punishing people for cooperating with your enemy than your enemy can punish them for cooperating with you.[163] Having this capability provides people with a reason to side with your coalition, thereby increasing the size of your coalition. The requirements of managing and building the coalition leads to the final type of intelligence required to acquire cognitive access.

## Political Intelligence

Irregular warfare is violent competitive coalition building, which requires a significant level of intelligence about coalition partners, prospective partners, other neutral groups, and the enemy coalition. This intelligence is vital because it can open opportunities and reduce the risk of duplicity in the friendly coalition. Intelligence about opportunities includes information that can

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[161]Mark Moyar, *Pheonix and the Birds of Prey: Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism in Vietnam* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

[162]Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 151-161.

[163]Ibid., 183-195.

lead to the ability to persuade neutrals or enemies to defect to the friendly coalition. In the Dhofar rebellion in Oman, the Omani government with significant assistance from the British Special Air Service acquired this type of intelligence to increase the support for the government in a systematic fashion. Combined with effective offensive and defensive operations, this political intelligence improved the moral access of the Omani government and its British advisors.[164] In Algeria, the French *Section Administrative Specialisee*, small teams and individuals who integrated the political, intelligence, and combat operations with native forces, became especially adept at collecting this type of intelligence, which proved vital to the pacification efforts.[165]

Political intelligence is also vital for reducing the risk of duplicity or defection from the friendly coalition. There is some overlap with the idea of defensive intelligence, but there is a different focus. Defensive intelligence overlaps between an operational level capability with tactical effects while political intelligence is concerned with the strategic and operational level of the coalition. There are countless ways that the friendly partners can undermine the coalition's moral access. First, it can defect to the enemy. A French-raised Algerian paramilitary unit, Force K, defected to the Algerian insurgents during the French counterinsurgency campaign.[166] A key leader in the South Vietnamese strategic hamlet program operated as a Communist agent, actively damaging the counterinsurgency effort.[167] Second, it can prey on the population, undermining the friendly coalition's legitimacy. Several Afghan paramilitary units created by U.S. Special

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[164]Tony Jeapes, *SAS: Operation Oman* (London: William Kimber, 1980), 229-234.

[165]Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace* (New York: New York Review Books, 2006), 108-109; Yoaz Gortzak, "Using Indigenous Forces in Counterinsurgency Operations: The French in Algeria, 1954-1962," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32, no. No. 2 (April 2009): 37–41.

[166]Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace* (New York: New York Review Books, 2006), 255-257.

[167]Truong Nhu Tang, *A Vietcong Memoir* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich, 1985), 47.

Operations Forces turned to extortion from the population.[168] Al Qaida's franchise organization in Iraq undermined Al Qaida's legitimacy through its bloody and often indiscriminate violence.[169] Third, it can choose banditry and organized crime. Frequently, many of the leaders of irregular forces have histories in petty and organized crime, including narcotics and other legitimacy-undermining activities. Right-wing paramilitaries that fought on the government's side in Colombia against the left-wing FARC damaged the government's legitimacy by widespread narcotics trafficking.[170] Fourth, they can choose to not cooperate with the friendly coalition, shirk their duties, or play both sides. During the Hukbalahap Insurrection in the Philippines, local paramilitaries hired by the government to secure infrastructure chose to not resist the insurgents whenever government regulars were not nearby.[171] Political intelligence is required to manage these operational risks because there are a myriad of ways that individuals and groups that nominally join the friendly coalition can undermine the coalition's strategy and continued moral access.

## Moral Access

Moral access is the ability to build a coalition based on more than renting a warlord, to paraphrase Fouad Ajami.[172] Moral access provides the standing and the credibility necessary to

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[168]Human Rights Watch, *"Just Don't Call It a Militia:" Impunity, Militias, and the "Afghan Local Police"* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2011).

[169]Peter Bergen, "Analysis: Bin Laden might find relief in al-Zarqawi's death," *CNN.com*, June 8, 2006, http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/06/08/bergen.zarqawi/ (accessed 1 June 2013).

[170]Mark S Steinitz, *The Terrorism and Drug Connection in Latin America's Andean Region*, vol. XIII (Washington, D.C., 2002), http://www.revistainterforum.com/english/ pdf_en/pp_steinitz.pdf (accessed 1 June 2013).

[171]Uldarico Baclagon, *The Huk Campaign in the Philippines* (Manila, Philippines: M Colcol & Company, 1960), 98.

[172]Fouad Ajami, "Afghanistan's Corruption, and America's Too," *Bloomberg News*, May

form an alliance of interests with the host of groups and individuals who act in irregular warfare. The grammar of irregular warfare is ultimately about violent coalition building to achieve what Clausewitz described as "public opinion."[173] Moreover, the proximity of the strategic and tactical levels in irregular war makes the special operators political operatives because they are directly affecting the strategic level of actors in the irregular war. Without the moral position from which to negotiate, an intervening power only has bribery to use to buy allies or affect the strategy of critical actors. The academic literature on alliances and coalitions, however, indicates that material benefits do not effectively buy allies, but can cement alliances of interest after their formation.[174] Three elements of establishing moral access support the pursuit of strategic objectives: maintaining a strong negotiating position with the principle partners, building legitimacy, and dividing the enemy.

<div align="center">Maintain Negotiating Position</div>

The campaign plan should maintain a strong negotiating position vis-à-vis the principle indigenous partners to avoid the pitfalls of alliances. One of the most vexing problems of building a coalition or alliance is balancing the paired threats of entrapment and abandonment.[175]

3, 2013, http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-05-02/afghanistan-s-corruption-and-america-s-too.html (accessed 15 June 2013).

[173]Clausewitz, *On War*, 596. Dr. Joe Strange and Colonel Richard Irons argue that the idea of a morale center of gravity is central to Clausewitz's discussion of strategic centers of gravity: Joe Strange and Richard Iron, "Understanding Centers of Gravity and Critical Vulnerabilities" (Quantico, VA, n.d.).

[174]Stephen Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985): 28.

[175]Abandonment and entrapment are two concepts from international relations, which normally describe relations between states. These terms and their supporting theoretical understanding can also apply to sub-state actors involved in an irregular war. In some cases, such as the irregular warfare of a failed state, the anarchy within the bounds of the internationally recognized boundaries is of the same anarchic self-help nature as international relations theorists use to describe international politics. Even when the system is more hierarchical but still

Abandonment, which is a major concern for states building defensive alliance systems, is less of an issue for special operators intervening in an irregular war. Abandonment, as its name implies, occurs when an ally abandons its erstwhile ally. Open abandonment is unlikely because it would open the partner to retaliation by the intervening state. The concept is important, however, because coalition partners inside the country fear abandonment by other indigenous actors and the intervening power. This is part of Afghan President Ahmed Karzai's objection to unilateral United States negotiations with the Taliban.[176]

Entrapment occurs when one party becomes bound to a policy it does not desire because its ally has forced it into this position. This is the major problem that an intervening power has when collaborating with a local actor. If that local actor believes that the intervening power has staked its reputation on that actor's success, then a moral hazard arises. That local actor can pursue operationally risky ventures in self-interest and leave the hard work to the intervening power. In the Vietnam War, the numerous corrupt officials in the Republic of South Vietnam pursued their individual self-interest instead of the good of their government in part because the United States had made its commitment clear. Once the United States became irrevocably committed to South Vietnam, it lost its negotiating position over the South Vietnamese officials. The Greek Civil War provides a case where the United States avoided this problem. President Truman committed to aiding Greece in resisting Communist revolution as part of the Truman

institutionally weak, the concepts of international relations can apply across the artificial conceptual boundary of the Westpahlian state. David A. Lake, "Beyond Anarchy: The Importance of Security Institutions," *International Security* 26, no. 1 (2001): 129–160; Stephen M. Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World," *World Politics* 61, no. 01 (December 18, 2008): 86; Thomas J Christensen and Jack Snyder, "Chain gangs and passed bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity," *International Organization* 44, no. 2 (1990): 137–168.

[176]Max Ehrenfreund, "Karzai objects to peace talks with Taliban in Doha after Kabul, Bagram attacks," *Washington Post*, June 19, 2013, articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-06-19/world/40064872_1_taliban-representatives-taliban-political-office-the-taliban (accessed 23 June 2013).

doctrine in 1947. The Greek government instead of believing that it had a blank check from the United States, constantly sought to reassure U.S. Government officials that it was doing everything possible because it feared that the United States would abandon Greece, an action that was contemplated.[177] The U.S. Government established a better alternative to continuing to work with the Greek Government than the Greek Government had.[178] One tangible result was that the Greek National Army eventually fully cooperated with the U.S. advisors.[179] An important difference between these two cases is that the United States maintained a very small force in Greece. This helped to prevent an alignment of otherwise neutrals against the government because of the foreign presence, a phenomenon that counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen terms the "accidental guerrilla syndrome."[180]

## Build Legitimacy

Legitimacy is one of the more difficult concepts to define.[181] The U.S. Army and Marine Corps Field Manual on counterinsurgency states that "governments described as 'legitimate' rule primarily with the consent of the governed."[182] Pursuit of this consent-producing legitimacy is the

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[177]Harris, *Instilling Aggressiveness: US Advisors and Greek Combat Leadership in the Greek Civil War, 1947-1949*, 105.

[178]In the negotiations literature the term is BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement), which is one of the most critical aspects of successful negotiations. Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1991), 97–105.

[179]Harris, *Instilling Aggressiveness: US Advisors and Greek Combat Leadership in the Greek Civil War, 1947-1949*, 104–109.

[180]David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[181]For a review and the literature and differing approaches to legitimacy, see: Fabienne Peter, "Political Legitimacy," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2010, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/legitimacy/ (accessed 24 June 2013).

[182]Department of the Army, *FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 2006), 1-21.

goal in irregular warfare.[183] Combatants should seek to build legitimacy, or the building of a

governing institution that the majority of people willingly submit to without recourse to violence

against that institution or its leaders. The special operators conducting the campaign cannot build

the legitimacy of their coalition. Rather, their coalition partners must pursue a strategic end state

that is acceptable to enough people, taking observable actions to establish credibility in the minds

of the people. The supporting operators can advise the coalitions' leaders in how to build

legitimacy, but it must be a locally produced end state to have the best chance of acceptance by

the majority of the actors in the country. The diffusion of the concepts of nationalism and anti-

colonialism undermined the ability of outside powers to impose legitimate strategic end states on

the people. Most importantly, the campaign should use its political intelligence to assess whether

its local partners have the capability and moral access to propose and build a governing institution

to which the majority of the people will willingly accede. The Israeli Defense Forces failed to

build the legitimacy of their proxy in Lebanon, the South Lebanese Army. Their proxy force,

assisted by a specially recruited unit, focused on narrowly focused security operations instead of

increasing legitimacy in the southern Lebanon population. In contrast, the Iranian-assisted

Hizbollah deliberately built a large support base. When the Israelis withdrew, their proxy

disintegrated in the face of the Hizbollah advance.[184]

     Moreover, the special operations campaign should avoid damaging the legitimacy of

strong partners and continually build its own legitimacy, which enables its operations because the

majority of the people willingly accede to its activities. This legitimacy is partly the result of U.S.

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[183]England, "DoD Directive 3000.07, Irregular Warfare."

[184]Ahron Bregman, *Israel's Wars* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 255–259; Gal Luft, "The Cultural Dimension of Multinational Military Cooperation" (Johns Hopkins University, 2002), 308–311, 339; Joshua Ruebner, "The South Lebanon Army (SLA): History, Collapse, Post-Withdrawal Status," in *Lebanon: Current Issues and Background*, ed. John Rolland (New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2003), 201–202; Norton, *Hezbollah*, 33–35, 83.

soft power and avoidance of indiscriminate violence.[185] Most importantly, the campaign's

designers should understand and respect that the local partners have their own strategic end state

that is different from the intervening power's end state. The campaign should seek to build an

alliance of interests, not local subordinates.[186] If the intervening power succeeds in a misguided

attempt to impose its will over the will of its local partners, it will undermine the legitimacy of

those local partners in the eyes of the other indigenous actors. Milt Beardon, a former Central

Intelligence Agency officer who assisted Afghan irregulars against the Soviet Army, advised

practitioners who are supporting irregulars: "don't try to convince yourself that you're in

charge."[187]

Additionally, the campaign plan should minimize the size of the force deployed into the

theater. Every additional soldier on the ground in the theater changes the dynamics of the local

political economy. Large forces will create unsustainable changes in the local economics and

politics. Every task that the intervening powers do is one that the local partners do not do, and

consequently they do not get to build competency in that task. The campaign should seek the

minimal level of intervention in the theater to avoid undermining the supported coalitions'

legitimacy.

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[185]Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004); Luke N Condra et al., "The Effect of Civilian Casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq," 2010.

[186]Amitai Etzioni, "Bottom-up Nation Building," *Policy Review* 158 (January 2010): 51–62.

[187]Joshua Keating, "Don't Try to Convince Yourself That You're in Control," *Foreign Policy*, June 2013, www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/06/14/interview_milton_bearden_arming_syrian_rebels?print=yes&hidecomments=yes&page=full (accessed 15 June 2013).

Divide the Enemy

Since irregular warfare is about competitive coalition building, it is imperative to degrade the enemy's coalition, preferably by dividing it and then aligning with former enemies through truce, alliance, or amnesty.[188] One part of this is what Anthony Joes calls displaying "rectitude" so that the forces do not elicit a fight-to-the-death instinct from their enemy.[189] Secondly, dividing the enemy entails identifying points of common interest. Thomas Schelling observed that there are always intra-war negotiations.[190] By combining enticement and coercion, the friendly coalition can maneuver segments of the neutral population and the enemy coalition into a position where it will negotiate and even make war on their erstwhile allies.[191] In the Philippines, the Philippine Government, supported by the United States Government and special operations forces, divided the opposing coalition of an Islamist based organization by making peace with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.[192]

Special Operations Forces Characteristics

These tenets of special operations operational art give rise to several characteristics that should describe units that states organize to contest the domain of weak institutions and intervene in irregular warfare. The logistical and protection constraints of physical access (insertion and

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[188]Timothy W Crawford, "Preventing Enemy Coalitions: How Wedge Strategies Shape Power Politics," *International Security* 35, no. 4 (2011): 155–189; Joes, *Resisting Rebellion*, 241.

[189]Ibid, 237.

[190]Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 126–189, 215–220.

[191]Paul K Davis and Brian Michael Jenkins, *Deterrence and Influence in Counterterrorism: A Component in the War on al Qaeda* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2002).

[192]Robert F. Trager and Dessislava P. Zagorcheva, "Deterring Terrorism: It Can Be Done," *International Security* 30, no. 3 (2005): 87-123.

sustainment) and maintaining a negotiating position to avoid entrapment led to the requirement for small teams with a small footprint. To maximize the effectiveness of this small package, the force should maximize the ratio of intelligence to soldier. In other words, the goal (although it is unattainable) is for every soldier to be materially involved in defensive, offensive, or political intelligence and daily contact with the indigenous population. That requires language and cultural skills. The dominance of the tactical offense, political sensitivity, and the need to demonstrate tactical competence to increase denunciations and encourage coalition building leads to the requirement for forces that have superior small unit tactical capabilities relative to the enemy, neutrals, and friendly indigenous forces. The need for tactical success and the mitigation of the numerous risks associated with physical access lead to the requirement for mature operators that can creatively solve problems. The imperatives of moral access, especially building legitimacy, lead to the requirement for highly disciplined individuals. Therefore, special operations forces are units organized, trained, equipped, and employed for irregular warfare and operate in small teams of highly disciplined and creative soldiers who are relatively tactically superior and maximize intelligence for tactics and strategy.

CONCLUSION

Since the formation of special operations forces in the Second World War, a precise understanding of special operations has remained obscure. This lack of understanding can lead to the misuse of special operations forces, a problem that has motivated many of the authors who have sought to develop a theory of special operations.[193] This study formulated a theory to fill this void by focusing on those factors that truly separate special from conventional operations and

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[193]Both Gray and Kiras write about this problem: Kiras, *Special Operations and Strategy: From World War II to the War on Terror*; Gray, "Handfuls of Heroes on Desperate Ventures: When do Special Operations Succeed?".

operational art of special operations. The fundamental difference is that special operations forces exist to combat irregular enemies. States create special operations forces to wage irregular warfare.

The fundamental difference between irregular and regular warfare is the combatants' institutional strength. Waging war is a collective human endeavor that requires the cooperation under the most trying of circumstances. Conventional militaries' familiarity with modern combined arms warfare obscures the critical features of irregular warfare, even though it is the older form of warfare. Institutional weakness constrains irregulars into certain operational approaches. They lack the ability to mount sustained tactical action, defend terrain, synchronize operations above the small unit level, or conduct modern combined arms warfare. Consequently, they wage war in the shadows, using guerrilla tactics, terrorism, and subversion.

As the survivors of an evolutionary competition of war in Europe that reinforced the institutional strength of the states, western states developed the organization of warfare to new heights of sophistication over the past two centuries.[194] The dominance of these industrial states at modern combined arms warfare created an incentive for weaker institutions that could not compete in conventional warfare to make advancements in irregular warfare. While irregular warfare has an ancient pedigree—it was the first form of warfare—other advancements provided irregulars the opportunity to combat the growing power of the state.[195] The spread of nationalism and ideology provided links between groups that had previously been isolated and vulnerable to state coercion. Money, knowledge, and material flowed along these links. World War II brought the next major advancement in irregular warfare. The requirements of total war led the combatants to field special operations forces to wage irregular war against the enemy's rear.

[194]Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, 224–227.

[195]Azar Gat, *War in Human Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare From Ancient Times to the Present*.

While these nascent attempts were not uniformly successful, they did spread weapons, radios, and ideas to irregulars around the world. The nuclear stalemate of the Cold War created incentives for the superpowers to compete below the threshold of vital national interests through irregular warfare. The collapse of the Soviet Union ended the Cold War and led to a new international structure where weak states increasingly collapsed in a wave of irregular warfare. Further technological advances, such as inexpensive weapons and communications, favored the irregular at the expense of conventional militaries.

Outside of the developed states, weak institutions frequently fail to suppress the challenge of newly empowered irregulars. The spread of irregular wars, ethnic conflicts, failed states, insurgencies, rebellions, and terrorism all attest to this trend. These irregular conflicts have critical characteristics that can inform the operational design of an intervening power. These conflicts show the dominant characteristics of irregular warfare: the inability to project power over distance; the prevalence of short-term offensive actions; the proximity of the tactical and strategic levels of war; violent competitive coalition building; and the mismatch between limited war for intervening powers and total war for indigenous combatants. These five characteristics lead to three broad requirements for intervening special operations forces to successfully access the irregular domain to achieve a strategic purpose: physical, cognitive, and moral access. Special operations campaigns should build a position of continuing relative advantage through steady expansion of physical, cognitive, and moral access.[196]

Physical access consists of inserting the forces into the theater, sustaining them in the theater, and isolating the theater from enemy access. Cognitive access consists of operations to build defensive intelligence to protect the very vulnerable forces, offensive intelligence to support

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[196]Dolman, *Pure Strategy: Power and Principles in the Space and Information Age*, 4; Osinga, *Science, Strategy and War: The Strategic Theory of John Boyd*, 166–172; Department of the Army, *ADP 3-0 Unified Land Operations*, iii.

precise strikes, and political intelligence to support the creation of an ever-growing coalition. Moral access consists of maintenance of a strong negotiating position with local allies to influence them toward the strategic purpose, building legitimacy to expand the coalition, and dividing the enemy's coalition. The continual expansion of these three forms of access over time can create a position of advantage, from which special operations forces can favorably influence the population, allies, and enemies to achieve a strategic objective. Consequently, special operations leaders should orient and arrange their tactical actions toward the continual expansion of these three forms of access and degrading the enemy's access.

These tenets do not neatly correspond with the elements of operational design. Centuries of conventional warfare experience gave form to these elements. Campaigns involving irregular warfare and special operations can successfully employ these conceptual planning tools. Additionally, planners can profitably combine the traditional elements and the proposed tenets. However, the tendency of the traditional tools is to create conceptual difficulty when applied to irregular warfare and special operations because they grew from insights gleaned from conventional wars' separate grammar of how tactical actions combine to create strategic effect. For example, the idea of decisive battle permeates the tenets of operational design. This is most obvious in the "decisive points" element, but it is also a hidden idea behind the narrative of center of gravity and end state. In irregular warfare, while the short-term tactical actions should be tactically decisive, the war will frequently be the antithesis of decisive. It is a violent political campaign with an uncertain end state based on building an ever-growing coalition of actors with independent strategic objectives.[197]

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[197]This focus on continuing instead of a clear end state closely aligns with Dolman's assertion that strategy is about continuation, not ending. Dolman, *Pure Strategy: Power and Principles in the Space and Information Age*, 4.

Additionally, there are nuances that the elements of operational design do not necessarily include that the proposed theory emphasizes. The emphasis on cognitive access tends to force a much closer connection between intelligence and operations. The elements of operational design do not reinforce this connection. The elements of operational art also lack the emphasis on moral access and coalitional warfare that is the very core of irregular and special operations warfare. Special operations operational art requires an intimate connection between intelligence and operations—to the point where they are indistinguishable—that constantly supports the moral access to wage the violent competitive war of coalition building.

Three areas stand out where future research can improve the understanding of irregular warfare and special operations. First, in-depth historical studies of individual conflicts using primary sources from as many perspectives as possible will add to the body of knowledge of irregular warfare. The pathologies of analysis that Kalyvas identified obscure most irregular conflicts.[198] The obscuration hides the local nature of the war in favor of simpler narratives, which hide the causes of success and failure. Sufficiently detailed studies could provide significant contributions to the understanding of causality and complexity in irregular wars. Second, future research can test and expand the proposed theory through case studies. Controlled within-case comparisons selected based on the tenets of special operations operational art would provide the strong causal inferences. Third, since institutional strength or weakness constrains actors, research into institutions, including how to strengthen or weaken institutions, would inform future operational designers.

Institutions are the formal and informal rules that guide human interaction. The nature of human institutions shape the nature of the wars they fight. In the modern world, there is an increasingly wide divergence in institutional strength, giving rise to two distinct forms of warfare.

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[198]Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 32–51.

These forms of warfare have distinct grammars that govern how tactical actions can produce strategic effects. Consequently, they are functionally separate domains of war. Institutionally strong modern states field conventional militaries and will increasingly field special operations forces designed to contest the irregular domain. Those special operations forces that understand the nature of irregular warfare and design their campaigns to support an ever-growing political coalition will tend to be more successful. However, special operations forces cannot dominate irregular campaigns without the willing support of the indigenous people. The people must willingly agree to the strategic end state that the intervening power desires. Otherwise, the campaign will fail. Irregular warfare, while it may lack ballot boxes, is ultimately about the choices of individuals and the future that they desire.

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